

# HISTORY OF BEGUM NURJAHAN

# **History of Begum Nurjahan**

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## *Preface*

The present work is a modest attempt at delineating the life story and evaluating the work of Empress Nurjahan Begum. Historians have so far treated Nurjahan only as the spouse of Jahangir, who possessed a lust for power and pelf and who by intrusion into politics, invited trouble from the intriguing nobles and ambitious princes. But the truth is that Nurjahan Begum participated in politics only to make Jahangir rule and govern as best as possible both in the well-being of the people and for the security of the empire. She attempted to establish a complete hegemony and sway of her husband over the empire. She was determined to check the growing menace of the nobility, who had become a substantial threat to imperial authority.

A courageous lady, Nurjahan understood the political and administrative problems of the day and suggested remedies. She was beautiful but her real beauty lay in her creative genius, so exquisitely expressed in all what she did. After the eloquent poetess Meera Bai, she was perhaps, the only other woman in medieval India, who gave a clarion call to the suppressed womanhood to 'arise and march ahead' on the path of righteousness and creativity. She exhorted upon them to establish their own identity and attain consciousness for leading a self reliant and honourable life.

Nurjahan could have continued the game of politics for which she had the ability, understanding and strong persona-

lity along with important contacts. But she preferred to quit the stage after the exit of Jahangir. She was born in quiet desolation and died in the same tune. This has been acknowledged as her most appealing quality and all other Mughal queens and princesses appear dwarf before her towering personality.

Nurjahan's achievements and failures both have been critically examined in this thesis and efforts have been made to delineate as dispassionately as possible a real portrait of an outstanding woman who just did not slip into history but by her resolute determination did create history. For my derivations I have depended upon the original source material available on the subject.

The topic was first suggested by my teacher Dr. M.S. Renick of St. John's College, Agra. My mother Prof. (Mrs.) Pratima Asthana encouraged and helped me in all possible manner suggesting many new dimensions of enquiry.

I am beholden to my guide and supervisor Prof. A.P. Mathur, Vice-Chancellor, Agra University, who inspite of his busy schedule found time to go through this work. He made correction and suggested improvements. As I submit this work. I feel proud of having worked under his benign guidance and affectionate supervision. I have no words to express my gratitude towards him for the inspirations and encouragements that he gave. Without his directions, it would not have been possible for me to complete the work in its present form.

I take this opportunity to thank all those who helped me in the completion of this work. I owe gratitude to my respected father Sri A.S. Asthana, my wife Mrs. Supreeti Anand and friends and well wishers who inspired me in the preparation of the thesis.

**Sugam Anand**

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## *Background*

The historiography of medieval India is traditionally a record of the wars and achievements of commanders and kings. More so for the Persian historians who, adhering to signs of time, mainly dwelt upon the theme of male chauvinism, referring casually to the queens and the princesses and their royal linkages. The achievements of the royal females in the socio-political field were of no significance for them. Most of them were official chroniclers and their narratives centred round the Emperor alone. The royal women, their tastes and talents hardly attracted their attention. But Empress Nurjahan Begum was the notable exception. Her beauty and wisdom, her romance and adventure, her success and failure, drew the attention not only of the court historians but also that of European travellers who according to their own whims described her as they liked.

The autobiography of Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir entitled 'Tujuk-i-Jahangiri' is considered to be the most authentic source material for the history of Nurjahan Begum<sup>1</sup> as compared to any other contemporary monograph or official chronicle. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri has been translated by

Alexander Rogers and Henry Beveridge.<sup>2</sup> It provides authentic and useful information about Nurjahan Begum. Jahangir praises her beauty and wisdom and through his masterly pen ventilates his own admiration for her genius.

Jahangir ruled over India for twenty-two years (1605 to 1627 A.D.). His reckless life and addiction to wine resulted in ill-health. Constant attacks of asthma and growing weakness made him to give up writing his autobiography in the seventeenth year of his reign.<sup>3</sup> He then entrusted the task to Motamid Khan, who continued the *Memoirs* upto the beginning of Jahangir's nineteenth regal year. Motamid Khan discontinued the memoirs in the name of the emperor, but went on with the narrative of the reign till Jahangir's death in a separate treatise known as *Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri*.

*Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri* was written during Shahjahan's reign. Motamid Khan records many details of Nurjahan's life. Another chronicler Muhammad Hadi, in the first quarter of the 18th century, attempted to continue the narration up to Jahangir's death. Hadi's introduction seems virtually to stem from the *Maasir-i-Jahangiri* of Kamgar Husaini, another work comprising an account of Jahangir's life from his birth to his accession. All the three works serve as continuation, completion and conclusion of Jahangir's *Memoirs*.

The *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi* is another version of the *Memoirs*. It contains an account of fifteen years of Jahangir's reign. No doubt, there is much, that correctly represents the sentiments of Jahangir but a portion of '*Salim Shahi*' must be ranked in the class of fiction. Major David Price translated it under the title of '*Memoirs of the Emperor Jahangir written by himself*'. A short work entitled *Intikhab-i-Jahangir-Shahi* is written by a 'contemporary and companion of Jahangir'. The extracts of these works are critically evaluated and translated by Elliot and Dowson in the monumental work entitled '*History of India as told by Indian historians*', Volume VI. They throw sufficient light on the life and work of Nurjahan and as such they deserve to be examined separately.



## Tujuk-i-Jahangiri

Jahangir was a facile pen. Like Babur, his grand-father, Jahangir was a renowned diarist.<sup>4</sup> Ill health and excessive drinking made Jahangir to spend a lot of his time inside the royal household. Circumstances helped him to write extensively on the women of his time. He writes about his sisters and other relatives with feeling. His bitterly weeps over the death of Shah Begum, his first bride and for days together refused to be consoled. He writes about his beloved wife Nurjahan with emotion. It was she who, by her love and devotion, won his heart. He is frank where he writes about his drinking bouts, dinner parties and festivities in the company of Nurjahan.

He immaculately describes Nauroz festival, wedding ceremonies and hunting expeditions along with the ladies. He recounts the magnificent presents of cloth, gold and jewels exchanged with queens and princesses and the liberal allowances made to them. Jahangir mentions the style of Nurjahan's functioning not merely as a royal consort but also as the chief queen,<sup>5</sup> taking active part in politics. Nurjahan had friends and foes both at the court. In the harem too she had rivals. Some Persian chroniclers opposed her and some lauded her. The foreign travellers were generally hostile towards her. But in Jahangir's own memoirs wherever she is mentioned, she is depicted as a paragon of virtue.

Tujuk-i-Jahangiri was first published by Sayyad Ahmad Khan at Ghazipur (1863) and then at Aligarh in 1864. The oldest text though incomplete, which is still preserved in Oriental Khuda Baksh Library Bankipur, was seized by Prince Muhammad Sultan, the eldest son of Aurangzeb from the Library of Qutb Shahi king of Golkunda in 1656 A.D.<sup>6</sup> Jahangir writes emphatically giving the extent of his empire, riots and rebellions, wars and conquests, imperial regulations, important appointments, promotions and dismissals and sketches of nobles and officers. He has related all the events in a fascinating style. The daily life of the Emperor

is more or less frankly described. However, he has glossed over some events like his own revolt against his father, circumstances that led to Prince Khusro's death and his marriage with Meherunnisa which creates some suspicion about his sincerity of purpose.

Many of the Persian chroniclers have mentioned in detail the life story of Nurjahan, her 'activities' in the harem, her wealth, the gardens and buildings constructed by her, her participation in the royal 'Jashans' and the 'romantic tale' of her marriage with Jahangir. Motamid Khan and Kamgar Husaini are prominent among such historians. The events of her life find absorbing and excellent treatment at their hands. The work of Motamid Khan, as stated earlier, is known as *Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri*.

### ***Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri***

The author was a high officer in the Mughal court who was an eye-witness to many events described in his work. The portion about Nurjahan forms the third part of his main book. It was edited by the two Maulvis-Abd Al Hadi and Ahmad Ali under the supervision of Major W.N. Lees and published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1865. The portions dealing with Nurjahan's ascendancy and the events of the last four years of Jahangir's rule are mainly translated by Elliot and Dowson Volume VI. Motamid Khan enjoyed the post of Bakshi or Paymaster in Jahangir's reign. On many matters he writes with authority and conviction. As regards his depiction of Nurjahan, he displays hostility and bitterness towards her in spite of the fact that he had been once a trusted commander of Nurjahan and helped her in the release of Jahangir when he had fallen a prey to the conspiracy of Mahabat Khan.<sup>7</sup> He completed his work after Jahangir's death. The work is a useful source material for the history of Nurjahan. Though he is not free from personal prejudices, his *Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri* provides a connected account of events and personalities of Jahangir's

reign. Nurjahan's role in politics and the reaction of orthodox nobility towards her ascendancy have been vividly portrayed.

### **Maasir-i-Jahangiri**

Khwaja Kamgar Ghairat Khan wrote his work *Maasir-i-Jahangiri* in the third year of the reign of Shahjahan who promoted him as Governor of Thatta and granted a prestigious manasab to him.<sup>8</sup> The manuscript is preserved in Khuda Baksh Library, Patna. This work served as the basis of 'Reign of Jahangir' written by Gladwin and published from Calcutta in 1788.

Some parts of the *Maasir* are derived from *Tujuk-i-Jahangiri* and *Iqbal Nama*. The author charges Nurjahan with misuse of power and holds her responsible for wars and dissensions, disorder and lawlessness in the empire.

### **Intikhab-i-Jahangiri**

The author of this book is unknown. A portion of it has been translated by Elliot and Dowson which contains the narration of the events of Mahabat Khan's rebellion against the supremacy of Nurjahan and the imprisonment of Jahangir by him. It also depicts as to how the brave empress released her husband from the imprisonment.\*

### **Pand Nama-i-Jahangiri**

The manuscript of this Persian work contains Jahangir's maxims and ordinances to regulate the private and public life of the people. It indicates the imprint of Nurjahan's genius and insight upon the evolution of a legal and ethical code of conduct.

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\* Elliot and Dowson, Vol. VI, pp. 446-452.

**Muntakhab-ul-Lubab**

Among later Persian historians Khafi Khan devotes one full chapter to the affairs of Nurjahan Begum in his *Muntakhab-ul-Lubab*. His work throws light on the literary genius of the talented woman and her positive achievements. Khafi Khan compiled some of Nurjahan's verses in his book.<sup>9</sup> *Muntakhab-ul-Lubab* was edited by Maulvi Kabir-al Din Ahmad and published by Bengal Asiatic Society. But surprisingly, his views about Nurjahan as a person are mainly based upon Motamid Khan's narration. He was in a much better position to unfold the inherent qualities of Nurjahan as also to critically and impartially examine the rumours and spicy additions to the original episode and the mystery around it. Perhaps he avoided revealing the hidden truth enmeshed in the web of the popular controversy.

**Tatimma-i-Jahangiri**

Another work of the later period is *Tatimma-i-Jahangiri* of Muhammad Hadi. He transcribed Jahangir's *Memoirs* of eighteen years and wrote in continuation. His work is known as *Tatimma-i-Waqiat-Jahangiri* which continues the narrative upto emperor's death. But it is based entirely on Motamid Khan's work. Some portions of this treatise have been translated by Elliot and Dowson. As stated earlier, the work totally ignores the importance and usefulness of Nurjahan's contribution and her creative role in history.

**Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi**

It was translated by Major David Price who belonged to the Bombay Army and was published by the Oriental Translation Committee of the Royal Asiatic Society. A reprint was published by Bangbasi Press in 1906. This book also fills the gap that had been left in the original *Memoirs*. But the work contains many fabrications.<sup>10</sup> Elphinston and other modern historians relying upon it wrote monographs that distort the history of Nurjahan Begum all the more.

## Fath Nama-i-Nurjahan Begum

The singular work which is completely devoted to Nurjahan's achievements as the Empress of India is *Fath Nama-i-Nurjahan Begum* authored by Kami Shirazi. The versified account not only narrates the judicious administrative measures taken by Nurjahan but also emphatically admires her prowess and prudence with which she supervised the military operations against Mahabat Khan and ultimately released her husband out of his clutches. The rotograph copy of (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris) manuscript is preserved in the Aligarh Muslim University.<sup>11</sup>

## Other Sources

Among the few manuscripts preserved at Khudabaksh Library, Patna, the most important one is *Haft Iqlim* of Ahmad Razi. It was composed in 1594. As the work of an author who belonged to the family of Muhammad Sharif, the grandfather of Nurjahan, it is reliable for knowing the history of her ancestors. Another manuscript preserved in the same Library is *Diwan i-Wasli* written by Muhammad Tahir Wasli. *Tuhfa-i-Sami* was written by Sam Mirza Safavi in 1550 A.D. It was published from Darul Funun, Patna in 1934 A.D.

Other works like *Tarikh-i-Yazd*, *Tarikh-i-Alam Ara-i-Abbasi*, *Rihanatul Adab*, *Baburnama*, *Humayun Nama*, *Akbar Nama*, *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Tazkira-Tahir Nasrabadi*, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, *Zakhirat* have been consulted either in original or translation. *Ruqqat-i-Saif Khan* of Saif Khan Munir is preserved at Patna University Library in microfilm. *Nuskha-i-Jahangir* is also preserved in the same Library. *Miftah-ut-Tawarikh* is another important source of information regarding Mirza Ghiyas Beg's migration to India. Its author is Beale and it was published from Agra in 1849.

*Tazkira-i-Tahir Nasrabadi* is preserved at Khuda Baksh

Library Patna and it was first printed in 1816. Its author's name is Muhammad Tahri Nasrabadi. Muhammad Sharif Hijri's *Diwan-i-Hijri* is also preserved in the same library. *Zakhirat-ul-Khawanin* (Vol. I) was recorded by Shaikh Farid Bhakkari and was published by Pakistan Historical Society' Karachi in 1961. *Sujan Rai's* work is known as *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*. It was edited by Zafar Hasan of Delhi in 1918. *Rihanatul Adab* was written by Tabrezi Muhammad Ali in six volumes and was printed at Shafaq Press Tabrez in 1835.

### European Accounts

The accounts of Europeans who visited India as Factors and Ambassadors are full of lively description of cities. Court scenes, festivals, processions and sketches of the personages with whom they came in contact. They were unfamiliar with Indian customs and traditions and they failed to realize and interpret correctly what they saw or heard. They were jealous and therefore unscrupulous when they high-lighted only the frivolous rumours and hearsay about important events and high personalities. As such, whatever they have recorded about empress Nurjahan Begum is totally based upon unfounded stories and scandalous bazar gossips.

Some of the travellers who visited the royal court, tagged scandals around Nurjahan's glamorous personality and attempted to vitiate history. The later Persian Chroniclers misrepresented history just to please Shahjahan in order to draw personal favours and gains from him. They based their information mainly upon Motamid Khan's *Iqbal Nama*. Sadiq Tabrezi and Khafi Khan also adopted the story narrated by him. Dr. Beni Prasad rightly asserts that the whole story is not supported by contemporary evidence and is a total fabrication.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the European travellers like Sir Thomas Roe (1615-1619), Edward Terry (1616-1619), Francisco Pelsaert

(1620-1627), Pietro Della Valle (1623-1624), John De Lact (who wrote in 1631) and Peter Mundy (1628-1634) not only exaggerated Nurjahan's influence over Jahangir but also misrepresented and maligned her for misuse of power. They, in their writings about Nurjahan, display unwarranted animosity towards her. The reasons for their biased record were inherent jealousy and prejudices towards Indian monarchs and able queens and so they chose to depend more upon trivial hearsay of the light veined nobles and cheap bazaar gossips than upon solid, sober and authentic information.

### **Captain William Hawkins**

Captain William Hawkins wrote his account which are contained in *Pilgrims*.<sup>13</sup> His 'Voyages' give us sufficient information yet they are mostly based on rumours. He travelled to India as the Captain of the ship named 'Hector' in the third voyage of the East India Company. He reached Surat from where he started for Agra in 1607. He lived there for five years and tried to collect information about affairs of the Mughal court and royal family.

Jahangir made him a captain of 400 horses. He also conferred upon him the title of Inglis Khan. Hawkins enjoyed the privileges of a resident Ambassador. He adopted Mughal style of life and enjoyed the luxuries of the Mughal Court. He married an Armenian Christian living in India and lived with her in a royal palace donated to him by Jahangir.

Hawkins records about the Nauroz celebrations, the weighing ceremony of Jahangir, Court glamour and the Emperor's daily life. His description is useful but not reliable and it should be read with caution. He was something of a scandal monger. Whatever he writes about Nurjahan is more of a spicy fabricated tale than a pure historical account.<sup>14</sup>

### **Francisco Pelsaert**

Francisco Pelsaert, a Dutch traveller, came to India in

1620 and lived here till 1627. He wrote Remonstrantie or Report which is primarily a commercial document. He stayed most of the time at Agra. He possessed a personal knowledge of Nurjahan's political ascendancy and her trade interests. No European traveller could ignore the indigo trade that developed around Agra. Pelsaert was involved in the indigo trade and in his own interest he often visited the royal court. His work was translated by W.H. Moreland and P. Geyl in English. He writes about social structure and administrative system and the environment in which the Dutch commerce was then conducted. He refers to the hardships he faced in the Court with regard to promoting Dutch trade and blames Nurjahan for it.<sup>15</sup>

Francisco Pelsaert's trade interest and official position kept him in constant touch with the court and the nobility. He had personal knowledge of the king's habits and life style. He closely watched Nurjahan's political ascendancy and her encouragement to trade and commerce. Pelsaert was on friendly terms with many nobels, who often invited him to their houses. He visited their mansions and received useful information about the working of Mughal Court and the royal household.

### **Sir Thomas Roe**

Sir Thomas Roe's writings, known as 'Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Great Mughal' have been edited by William Foster with a critical introduction and some notes and appendices. It was published by the Hakluyt Society. Roe was selected to represent king James I at the court of Jahangir by the East India Company for securing further concessions for the English 'factories' in India. He sailed with fifteen followers on the ship known as 'Lion' on 2nd February 1615. He reached Surat on 18 September, 1615. He reached Ajmer on December 23, 1615 to meet Jahangir and Nurjahan who were camping there. He presented himself at the Court on 10th January, 1616 and lived there for ten months.



Roe befriended the high personages present at Ajmer and tried to convince them of the efficacy of concluding a commercial treaty between England and the Mughal Empire. He presented a beautiful English Carriage of four horses to Empress Nurjahan Begum. He joined the Royal Convoy which left for Mandu and then to Ahemadabad during the end of 1617 A.D. All his efforts failed and he could not get any success in his mission. He left the court in 1618. Jahangir and Nurjahan left Mandu and came back to Agra, Roe returned to England in 1619.

Sir Thomas Roe gives a vivid description of the court of Prince Parvez at Burhanpur, the imperial court at Ajmer, the Nauroz Celebration and the event of Jahangir's departure from Ajmer to Mandu. He has recorded his impressions about the empress, princes, princesses and men and women that mattered in the Mughal Court like Jahangir, Shahjahan, Prince Khusrau, Asaf Khan, other nobles and above all Nurjahan Begum, who was very helpful to him in advancing the claim of British trade as against those of the Dutch and the Portuguese. But his comments, specially about Nurjahan, are full of prejudice. He becomes completely unreliable when he deals with matters beyond his own personal observation.<sup>16</sup>

### **Rev. Edward Terry**

Terry wrote his 'Voyage to East India' in 1622. It was published in 1655 and was reprinted in London in 1777. He supplements Roe's account of Jahangir's life, character and administrative policy. He mentions about the Court, the Council, the Camp and its march. But he shares the defects of Sir Thomas Roe and becomes highly prejudiced when he writes about Nurjahan Begum.<sup>17</sup>

### **Pietro Della Valle**

Pietro Della Valle recorded his observations in 'Travels'. It was edited by Edward Grey with a critical introduction,

notes and index and published by the Hakluyt Society in two volumes. The information about India is covered in the first volume. He also depends on bazaar gossips while writing about Nurjahan Begum.<sup>18</sup>

### John De Laet

John De Laet's writings are contained in "De Imperio Magni Mogalis". It was published by Elzevir at Leyden in 1631. The account of Jahangir's reign is given in 'Fragmentum'. It is a useful account and is in substantial agreement with the account recorded by Persian historians. But De Laet is not reliable on matters beyond his observation or reach and his descriptions about Nurjahan are fabricated as they are based more upon imagination and concoction than on facts.

### Later European Travellers

Among the later European travellers and factors who visited India during the reigns of Shahjahan (1627-1658) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707) were Peter Mundy, Mandelslo, Barnier, Tavernier, Thevenot and others. Many of them relate the story of Jahangir and Nurjahan as it was popularly current in India at the time of their visit.

### Peter Mundy

His 'Travels' was edited by Lt. Col. Sir Richard Carnac Temple with excellent notes and index. It is furnished with maps and bibliography. His descriptions of Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and some other cities are very valuable source of information. But what he records about Nurjahan Begum, is legend rather than history. His assessment of Nurjahan's role in politics is neither convincing nor reliable. He honestly admits that what he wrote about Nurjahan and others is a vulgar report based upon commonly received information and opinion.<sup>19</sup>

## Manucci

Manucci's *Storio do Mogor* was translated by W. Irvine (London, 1914). His account of Nurjahan is based on bazaar gossips and is not worthy of being treated as a source of historical information. While writing about Nurjahan's influence over Jahangir, he depends on gossips and stories.

## Francois Bernier

Bernier came to India in 1658 and wrote his account after many years of Jahangir's reign. As such it can not be considered to be accurate and authentic. He portrays important personalities and describes interesting events in lighter vein. He collected information from old Portuguese and English women living with aristocratic families who often visited the royal harem. Bernier writes about the love affair of Prince Salim and Meherunnisa and holds the view that Sher Afghan was killed by Jahangir's cousin. His work was revised by V.A. Smith and published in 1934.

European travellers, frustrated in their designs and ambitions charged Nurjahan with an insatiable lust for power and wealth. They over stressed gossips and rumours about Nurjahan and Jahangir. This gave sufficient impetus to Modern European historians of Medieval India to dwell at length upon trivial issues like the murder of Sher Afghan and Nurjahan's marriage with Jahangir with a pinch of spice to arouse cheap curiosity among the readers. The European historians who narrate the tale of adolescent romance of Salim and Meherunnisa are Gladwin, Elphinstone, Smith, Lanepoole, Keene and others. But all of them suffered from bias and prejudice against mighty Indian Emperors and high royal personages. They deliberately distorted history in order to present India and Indians of the past in such a way as to belittle them in the eyes of posterity. Thus they chose to depend for the history of Nurjahan Begum on the contemporary European travellers, who had their own parameters of

judgement. They, on account of their vested interests, colossal ignorance, irrational prejudices and flight of imagination could not be accepted as authentic evidence needed for an impartial historical treatise. Important among Indian historians who have dealt with the theme are Beni Prasad, Ishwari Prasad, S. R. Sharma and A. L. Srivastava. Beni Prasad altogether rejects the story of Jahangir's love of Meherunnisa and calls it later concoction but Ishwari Prasad and A.L. Srivastava conclude that the episode smells fishy.

In the present monograph an attempt has been made to study the life and work of Empress Nurjahan Begum in an impartial and dispassionate manner. The sources in Persian as well as in English along with Urdu and Hindi translations have been tapped and sifted with caution and accuracy. Beside the texts, the Mughal paintings have also been used for the purpose of making the work as scientific as possible. A large number of Mughal miniature paintings are available which depict harem scenes. They help in recapitulating the beauty, charm and brilliance wrought on Nurjahan's attractive and broad forehead. She is depicted as playing Vina or Sitar. She is painted with Jahangir on Shikar and also in the background of flowering landscapes with clinging creepers, chirping birds and land companions. Her clothes, coiffures, jewelleryes, interest, hobbies, pastimes have been faithfully portrayed in a most captivating style to serve as an important source of study of her taste, temper and refinement.<sup>20</sup>

A few Farmans and Nishans of Nurjahan are available in the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. They pertain mainly to the period between 1622 and 1626 when Jahangir had become almost invalid.<sup>21</sup> Some Farmans are in the name of Nurjahan Begum and Jahangir both. Some coins were struck in her name by the orders of Jahangir which signify her political supremacy.<sup>22</sup>

The cultural refinement of empress Nurjahan Begum finds eloquent expression in the tomb of Etmad-ud-daula and

a few other buildings, gardens and lakes of her time which act as a built-in reminder of the creative genius of the queen. These archaeological remains form a very vital and important source material for delineating the history of a woman who herself made history.

## References

1. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri in original is at present preserved in the Oriental Khudabaksh Library. The researcher possesses a Persian text of Tujuk written by Mirza Muhammad Hadi and published by Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow. However, the English translation of Rogers and Beveridge (III ed.) published in 1978 has also been referred to.
2. It was translated into English by Rogers. It was later revised, edited and annotated by Henry Beveridge.
3. Jahangir's autobiography forms the prime authority for the study of his reign and personality.
4. The Emperor's own daily life is revealed with candour and frankness in Tujuk-i-Jahangiri.
5. Contemporary Persian Chroniclers project her with a mixed feeling and are divided on the issues related to her political supremacy.
6. Dr. Beni Prasad, History of Jahangir, Oxford University Press (London), 1922, Appendix C, p. 454.
7. He narrates the advent of Nurjahan's family to India. The portions of his work Iqbal Nama in which he criticizes Nurjahan were added during the time of Shahjahan.
8. Dr. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 456.
9. Khafi Khan, Muntakhab-ul-Lubab (volume I), pp. 270-71.
10. Dr. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 455.
11. Rotography, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University (No. 66).
12. Dr. Beni Prasad writes about the accounts of European travellers that, 'whenever they treat matters beyond their immediate purview, they often go helplessly astray'. *Op. cit.*, p. 464.

13. Included in Purchas, edited by Mac Lehosé, vol. III.
14. Dr. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-65.
15. Pelsaert wrote "Jahangir disregarding his own person and position, has surrendered himself to a crafty wife of humble lineage as a result of either of her arts or her persuasive tongue". 'Jahangir's India', Translation of Remonstrant, Cambridge, 1925, p. 50.
16. Dr. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 467-68.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 468.
18. Pietro Della Valle, Travels I, pp. 54-55.
19. Peter Mundy, Travels II, p. 206.
20. Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi, p. 46.
21. A descriptive list of Farmans, Manshurs and Nishans addressed by Imperial Mughals to the Princes of Rajasthan. (Published by the Govt. of Rajasthan). Also—Tirmizi, S.A. 'Edicts from the Mughal Harem,' pp. 20-53. Published by Idara-i-Adliyat, Delhi, 1979.
22. On Nurjahan's coins it is written that "by order of the King Jahangir, gold has a hundred splendour added to it by receiving the name of Nurjahan, the queen Begum."

## *Tryst With Destiny*

Indian history is replete with deeds of heroic women who by their outstanding achievements left a deep imprint on the polity and society of the time. Nurjahan was one such rare woman. Gifted with enormous creativity, she not only closely associated herself with the politics of the day, but also played a positive role in bringing about a rare amalgamation and a unique synthesis of culture through an articulate interaction between the Hindu life style and Persio-Mughal life pattern. In her own way, she made an exemplary attempt at the rejuvenation of the suppressed women of the medieval age and instilled in them, a new hope and aspiration without any consideration of class, caste or creed.

In the entire Mughal history, no woman was so fascinating and so full of prudence, brilliance and excellence as was Empress Nurjahan Begum, who made a lasting impact of her dynamic personality not only upon her age, but also upon posterity. Radiating lustre and splendour in the Mughal court, she brought about a total transformation of the socio-cultural life of the day. The author of "The History of Jahangir" rightly holds, "for full fifteen years, the celebrated lady stood forth as the most striking and most powerful personality in the Mughal empire."<sup>1</sup> It is no wonder, therefore,

that a thick fog of myth and fable, romance and adventure gathered around her personality that evoked curiosity and interest among the scholars of medieval Indian History. It would therefore be proper to trace the family heritage and early life of Nurjahan Begum.

### **Her Ancestors**

Nurjahan's family background was no less significant than her personal achievements. Her ancestors occupied dignified and high positions at the court of Safawi Kings of Persia. Her grand father Muhammad Sharif began his career as a Beglar Begi of Khurasan and worked in different capacities at the Persian Court. His reputation as a skilled warrior and able administrator rang so high as to reach the ears of Shah Tahmasp, who was so deeply impressed by his ability, bravery and honesty that he entrusted upon him the full powers to manage the affairs of the state as Wazir. Wizarat then was some sort of a finance office akin to the post of Diwan. According to Haft Iqlim and Maasir-ul Umra, Muhammad Sharif was the Wazir of Tatar Sultan, son of Muhammad Khan.<sup>2</sup>

According to Sam Mirza, Muhammad Sharif, a scion of the renowned Persian family was the nephew (brother's son) of Maulana Ummidi Tehrani of Tehran.<sup>3</sup> He was known as Hijri because he belonged to the town of Hijri in the province of Bahrain, and also because his pen name was Hijri. As he was brought up in Yazd, he was renowned as Yazdi also.<sup>4</sup>

Straight-forward as he was, Muhammad Sharif was gifted with the unique art of conversation, avowed simplicity and cool courage. He was appointed the Governor of Yazd, Abarqro and Bayatank for seven years. Muhammad Tahir Wasli, the son of Muhammad Sharif calls his father as Musahib of Shah Tahmasp.<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Sharif performed the duties attached to the office with great zeal and skill and he received the honour of being appointed as the Wazir of Darul Sultanate Isfahan.<sup>6</sup> He earned name and fame for his judicious



decisions and sound administration. He managed the Department very well and increased cultivation and expeditiously collected Diwani taxes. His honesty, dedication and sincerity of purpose won him laurels from the Raiyyats and the soldiers of the Sultanate.<sup>7</sup>

Khwaja Muhammad Sharif had two brothers and a sister. The eldest brother was Khwaja Mirza Ahmad whose son Ahmad Razi wrote the important work 'Haft Iqlim'. He was brave, courageous and generous. He was a high official under Shah Tahmasp Safawi. The younger one, Khwaja Khwajagi was an accomplished poet and a brilliant conversationalist. He possessed mastery over wit and humour. He had a son named Shapur who also was a famous poet of his time. He visited India twice in connection with some commercial engagements. He was deeply interested in having permanent commercial linkage with India.<sup>8</sup>

Khwaja Muhammad Sharif had two sons, one was Khwaja Muhammad Tahir and the other was Khwaja Ghiyasuddin Muhammad. Khwaja Ghiyasuddin Muhammad was the worthy father of Nurjahan Begum.<sup>9</sup> Both the sons of Khwaja Muhammad Sharif were accomplished poets and writers and erudite scholars. They were also talented administrators. Many distinguished members of this family were related through matrimony to reputed Persian families like that of Aqa Mulla Dawatdar Qazwini of Iran who was the Chief Courtier of Shah Tahmasp Safawi.<sup>10</sup> The daughter of Aqa Mulla Dawatdar Qazwini was married to Khwaja Muhammad Sharif.<sup>11</sup> Inter-marriages between the two Persian families continued even after their migration to India. All of them played significant part in the court politics of the Mughal emperors.

The ancestors of Nurjahan made remarkable contribution to Persian art, literature and administration. Nurjahan was greatly privileged to have such a rich ancestry and heritage. Her ancestors on migration, brought niceties and

delicacies of Persian culture to India which merged in the indigenous cultural moorings in a manner that led to sprout a fresh charm and colour.

The Persians (the Iranis and the Turanis inclusive), who migrated to India, had been in the service of Mughal Kings since the time of Babur.<sup>12</sup> In the course of time, the Royal Court became a refuge to them when they fled on account of intrigues and disgust from their mother country. Babur invited and enjoined upon them 'to see prosperity together'.<sup>13</sup> Humayun, extending patronage called upon them to join his ranks.<sup>14</sup> Akbar encouraged them to settle in India and provided them with all the basic amenities required for a luxurious regal living.<sup>15</sup>

Akbar displayed a rare genius and shrewd diplomacy in the arduous and adventurous task of empire building. With courage and determination, he came out of the crises that he faced in and outside the empire. He organized the nobility which included efficient warriors and astute diplomats. He offered ample opportunities to the Persians to show their worth and demonstrate their merit. Many talented Persians, disgruntled by the reign of terror enforced by Shah Tahmasp in Persia, preferred to come and settle in India. Under the impelling circumstances of parochialism and autocratic behaviour of the ruler many a noble belonging to the ancestral family of Nurjahan Begum also migrated to seek their fortune in India under the liberal patronage of Akbar the great.<sup>16</sup>

The ancestors of Nurjahan Begum in fact, migrated to India under stress and strain. Either they had lost hold over their high jobs or they did not feel secure there. Akbar's court promised them not only a bright career but also facilitated recognition of their merit and talent. Besides being good warriors, they were administrators of high order and eminence. In India they found a congenial environment and setting where they could flourish and prosper without any pressure or

tension. The Mughal Court provided them with a kindly shelter to flourish. While serving in India they experienced an air of freedom and relief. They could easily find venues to display the best of their calibre and mite.

During Akbar's reign, Nurjahan's ancestors earned fame and turned fortune. By the dint of merit they were awarded Mansabs and assigned important jobs both in the Provincial and the Central Government. For example, when Khwaja Ghiyasuddin Ali helped Akbar in the war against Muhammad Kaka at Ahmedabad, he was raised to the position of the Bakshi of Ahmedabad after imperial victory.<sup>17</sup> In 1578 he was sent to Malwa. Another important ancestor of Nurjahan who flourished under Akbar was Jafar Beg. Unfortunately he lost the royal favours and incurred the wrath of the emperor. He was sent on punishment to Bengal which was then considered to be a bad region known for its damp climate and political instability.

When rebellion broke out in Bengal, Jafar Beg came back to Fatehpur Sikri.<sup>18</sup> Appreciating his gesture of not siding with the enemies, Akbar raised him to the post of Mir Bakshi.<sup>19</sup> He was sent in the war against the Rana of Udaipur in which he proved his worth. He was later appointed the Thanedar of Swat.<sup>20</sup> In 1594, he was sent to Kashmir where he got an opportunity to show his great organizational skill.<sup>21</sup> He was then appointed the Governor of Kashmir. In 1599 he was raised to the distinguished post of Diwan-i-Kul. In 1603 he was sent to Bihar as Governor and was granted the rank of 3000.<sup>22</sup>

### **Mirza Ghiyas Beg**

After the death of Muhammad Sharif, his second son Mirza Ghiyas Beg fell under the spell of evil stars in Persia.<sup>23</sup> He faced the vicissitudes of life and had its bitter taste. Poverty and declining fortune prompted Mirza Ghiyas Beg to leave Persia and migrate to India. Though the contemporary chroniclers avoided mentioning the cause of Mirza

Ghiyas Beg's migration to India, one later author noted that he was occupying the important post of Hakim-i-Khurasan but when became a "baqidar" and owed money to the state, he decided to leave his country in search of better prospects.<sup>24</sup>

As stated earlier, his uncle Shapur had visited India for commercial purposes. He wrote about the congenial atmosphere prevalent in India specially for the Persians who desired to serve at the royal court. In 1577, Mirza Ghiyas Beg set on his tedious journey of India with his two sons and a pregnant wife, whom he had married against the wishes of his family members. The same year, Nurjahan Begum saw the light of the world while they were on their way to India amidst dangers and difficulties beyond description.

Describing Mirza Ghiyas Beg's travel from Tehran to India Lanepolle says, "The travellers were a Persian and his wife, who fled from their country to seek home in another which was denied to them in their own. The man was handsome, the woman was young and beautiful. To crown her husband's misery and her own she was about to become a mother. They had several days journey to perform without being provided with any sustenance for so long and arduous travel and the chances of meeting with passengers were so remote as to render their perishing in the wilderness almost a certainty."<sup>25</sup>

He further observes that, "the anxious husband held an umbrella over the head of his wife as he walked painfully along by the side of her on an ambling pony. He was however marvellously sustained by the excitement of his anxiety for the dear object near him who bore with unrepining endurance, privations which in her state were especially deplorable. She was exhausted with fatigue, her tongue was parched with thirst and she had fever. Without food, without water the woman was having labour pains in a bewildered land. Her suffering was appalling yet she did not murmur."<sup>26</sup>

Mirza Ghiyas asked his wife to stay behind. He went further to arrange for some food and water. As he came back, he found that his wife had become a mother. The cry of the baby raised within him emotions of parental joy but it vanished with the consciousness of awful perils ahead. He kindled a fire upon the wide blasted desert to pass there the dark night. In the morning they resumed the journey. The woman was very weak, yet she carried her infant as Mirza Ghiyas was loaded with necessities.<sup>27</sup>

“The silence of the desert alone witnessed their pangs, perils and privations. They saw nothing save the wide arid expanse of the desert before them. Nothing moved their steps forward except profound faith in God. Mirza Ghiyas was gradually moving ahead overwhelmed with despair. He feared that his wife was dying. She could no longer carry the infant in her hand and it might cause danger to both of them. Only one alternative haunted his mind to leave the infant alone in the desert.”<sup>28</sup>

Mirza Ghiyas did not know, then, that his daughter who was born in the midst of perils and poverty was destined to become the Empress of India one day. Lanepoole further narrates, “The mother having kissed it fervently, consigned it to the arms of her husband, who having taken it to a spot where the stunted stock of a tree portruded from the scorching sand, placed it under the scanty shade of this bare emblem of sterility, and having covered it with leaves, left it to the mercy of that God who can protect the babe in the desert as well as the sovereign on the throne. On rejoining his wife the Parsian found her so weak that he feared she would be unable to proceed. Though released from the burden of her infant, her prostration of strength was so extreme, from the united effects of mental and bodily suffering that she could scarcely rise from the earth. The pangs of thirst were again becoming horrible; still after a severe struggle, she rose, and the wretched pair pursued their journey in silence and agony.”<sup>29</sup>

As they advanced a few steps, Asmat Begum, the worthy wife of Mirza Ghiyas Beg could not bear the separation of her daughter and the invincible yearnings of motherhood conquered at last. Lanepoole narrates further that, "she began to cry and Mirza Ghiyas Beg had no option left than to retrace his steps to reach the spot where he abandoned the infant. While removing the dry leaves, he saw a black Cobra coiled round with its hideous mouth over the head of the child. In a frenzy of desperation, he attempted to run away when the paternal love got the upper hand and he stood there fearlessly. The snake gradually uncoiled without committing slightest injury to the newly born and retired into the hollow trunk lying nearby. Mirza Ghiyas snatched the child and brought her back to return the innocent baby to his wailing wife, who became so happy that she forgot all her miseries.<sup>30</sup>

With great difficulty, Mirza Ghiyas and his family reached the border of India. Though he was robbed and waylaid many a time, he barely managed to save his wife some how on the way. He was stripped off every possession by an Afghan gang of notorious decoits who left only an aged horse with him.<sup>31</sup> In his sufferings, he prayed to God to send a helper. It was indeed a miracle when the leader of the caravan Malik Masud reached there as the redeemer. Malik Masud tried to provide all comforts to his ailing wife and the 'newly born'. He gave them food and shelter. When they came to Lahore, Malik Masud introduced Ghiyas Beg to a Persian noble Murtaza Ahmad who had joined Akbar's court two years ago. Murtaza Ahmad made arrangements for the comfortable stay of the family at Lahore in October, 1578 in a mansion near the Fort. Ghiyas Beg lived there for a month. Murtaza Ahmad recommended Ghiyas Beg for a job in the Mughal Court through the Governor of Punjab and Malik Masud took him along with his family to Agra and Fatehpur Sikri.<sup>32</sup>

The travellers reached the Mughal capital early in 1579.

In the same year, the magnanimous Emperor Akbar proclaimed the policy of *Sulah-i-Kul* after holding deliberations in the *Ibadat Khana* with *Ulemas*, Hindu pandits, Jain and Buddhist monks, Tantriks, Zoroastrian priests, Christian bishops and Sufi saints. The people happily talked about Akbar's liberal views, his *Din-i-Ilahi* and his benevolent attitude towards one and all. He had come to be known as the peace-maker and arbiter in the frenzied discussions by the leaders of the various religious communities who gathered in the *Ibadat Khana*.<sup>33</sup>

Ghiyas Beg and his wife Asmat Begum were amazed to see the royal grandeur and know about the liberalism that the Mughal emperor preached and practised. They quickly attuned themselves to the royal customs and manners. Malik Masud took them to Akbar's Court at Fatehpur Sikri<sup>34</sup> where he and his trade articles like carpets, shawls and chandeliers were very popular. The ladies of the harem and the nobles specially, were fond of these articles. He first introduced Asmat Begum to queen Jodha Bai who was highly impressed by the serenity and dignity displayed by Persian Woman of the noble blood. On 11th March 1579, the day of joint celebration of *Nauroz* and the 24th anniversary of Akbar's accession to the throne, Mirza Ghiyas Beg was summoned to the Emperor's audience.<sup>35</sup>

With a setting of customary pageantry and display of splendour and wealth, the royal functions ensued. Akbar was weighed with gold, silver and precious metals and stones. All the nobles and the relatives offered greetings and presents to the Emperor. Malik Masud also presented to the Emperor many gifts of enormous value. Ghiyas Beg, on his turn, presented 'Asharfis' in a carved silver casket to the Emperor. Akbar was deeply impressed by the Persian migrant whose manners were dignified and respectful. He ordered Todarmal to assign him some work of responsibility.<sup>36</sup> No one knew then that this Persian family would enjoy power beyond limit and guide the destiny of India for many years to come.

Later on Faizi, the Master of Ceremonies in the Mughal Court formally introduced Mirza Ghiyas Beg to Akbar. Discerning in him the qualities of a loyal and faithful officer, Akbar immediately granted him a Mansab of 300 which was later raised to 700.<sup>37</sup> It was further raised to 1000 and he was made the Commander of a thousand horses. He gradually rose to hold the post of the Master of royal household.<sup>38</sup> He skilfully succeeded in winning the emperor's trust through hard work, valour and honesty. He used to accompany Akbar on hunting expeditions and military campaigns and often narrated the stories and anecdotes about the kings and queens of Persia and Central Asia. His sense of wit and humour was supreme. He was well versed in History and Literature. He knew many languages. He was a member of royal encourage on Akbar's second expedition to Kashmir in 1588-89 and shortly after, he was elevated to the post of the Governor of Kabul where he rendered commendable services.

Mirza Ghiyas Beg's etiquette, demeanour and good behaviour won many friends for him. They were both Hindus and Muslims. Birbal, Todarmal and other important nobles of the Mughal Court had become his fast friends in a short span of time. Once he presented a letter to Akbar written by Humayun to his grand-father conveying thanks for extending him help and cooperation in the hour of need. Akbar was delighted to see it and presented precious robes to Mirza Ghiyas Beg. The Persian noble was struck with awe, admiration and reverence at the royal gestures of generosity, exuberance and court-modalities. He found that Akbar's Court was far more magnificent than that of the Persian Shah and he realized that fortune had brought him to the right place. "He who had almost perished through want, not only became in the span of a few years a favoured noble of the majestic monarch of India but also became one of his more trusted and reliable friend..<sup>39</sup> The emperor reposed implicit confidence in him. It was well deserved and ended only with his life.<sup>40</sup>

He and his wife Asmat Begum were regular invitees to



the ceremonial functions held in the royal palace. Asmat Begum was liked by the Rajput queens of Akbar and they maintained happy relations with her. They admired not only the Persian beauty in Asmat Begum but also her quiet temperament, creative mind, high demeanour and fascinating disposition. On festive occasions, she alongwith other family members of Mirza Ghiyas Beg used to receive costly presents from the Emperor and the chief queen.<sup>41</sup>

Akbar ordered two houses to be built for him one at Agra and the other at Fatehpur Sikri. He was specially soft and liberal to the men of Central Asian and Persian origin. The intellect and talent of Ghiyas Beg attracted him most. Mirza Ghiyas on his part, served the emperor with devotion and dedication. He was considered to be exceedingly intelligent and tactful noble for his literary and administrative qualities. His tact and vision were unique. He was a literary giant whose comprehension of Persian words, their uses and meanings was matchless and his indepth study of old poets was par excellence. His generosity and benevolence knew no bounds. No one returned disappointed from his house. The title 'Mirza' conferred upon him by the Emperor signifies the public acknowledgement of Ghiyas Beg's character, talent and personality. It implied the idea of a perfect gentleman.<sup>42</sup>

Mirza Ghiyas Beg possessed rare qualities of head and heart which won him not only rapid promotion but also veneration from one and all. His ascendancy in the Mughal Court bears a sharp contrast to the earlier phase of his life when he was a desolate traveller in the desert.

### **Meherunnisa**

It would be no exaggeration to assert that the turn in Mirza Ghiyas Beg's fortune came with the birth of his daughter whom he named Meher-un-nisa. The royal favours granted to him at Agra, Kabul and Fatehpur Sikri made his family life happy and comfortable. Meherunnisa, a rare

beauty and enchanting charm, grew up in a congenial setting of a happy home. She was endowed with unique intelligence and rare wisdom.

Mirza Ghiyas Beg was then prosperous enough to make adequate arrangements for the education of his children. He loved his daughter most because it was she who brought him fortune beyond imagination. He employed Maulvis to train Nurjahan in religious scriptures. By the time she was fifteen, she acquired proficiency in history and Persian classics.<sup>43</sup> Poetry attracted her and she herself became poetry with her rhythmic form and lyrical disposition. She composed beautiful lyrics and verses on themes carrying spontaneous outflow of her emotions that sprang up in her sensitive mind as she watched objects of nature in the gardens.<sup>44</sup>

Meherunnisa acquired proficiency in fine arts and she painted a scene from Nauroz celebrations when she was only thirteen. The painting was admired by the famous poet painter Ustad Abdus Samad. She loved Music and had herself a melodious voice. She got frequent opportunities to listen to Tansen and other master musicians on festive occasions in the royal palace alongwith her parents. She loved nature and spent sufficient time in the garden of her house. Her avowed simplicity and literary attributes won the admiration of all who saw or heard her.<sup>45</sup>

Meherunnisa spent her childhood in the mansion of her father Mirza Ghiyas Beg where full facilities of a comfortable life were available to her. She lived with her parents at Agra, Kabul and Fatehpur Sikri. She was a loving daughter and her mother Asmat Begum, an accomplished lady, took personal care in training her in sewing, embroidery and dress designing, and the Persian style of Zari work.<sup>46</sup>

So sharp was her intellect and so deep was her insight that she displayed rare originality in all what she did. She was apt in the art of cooking and learnt many a recipe from

her mother to cook delicious and tasty dishes. In interior decoration she exhibited supreme sense of beauty, colour and symmetry. Interior decoration was her hobby. She meticulously chose the colours of the curtains, Persian Jars and Surahis, the sceneries to be hung on the walls and who-soever visited the palace of Mirza Ghiyas Beg was struck by the taste and refinement of his daughter.<sup>47</sup>

It is indeed marvellous that one born in a desert with her mother panting breathlessly in pain and agony, was inadvertently picked up by the golden turn of Fortune to be the Empress of India. The delicate Meherunnisa who possessed a good fortune, never knew herself that a grand fortune awaited her. She found in Sher-i-Afghan, the jewel of a man, with whom she led a contented life in Burdwan. As the widow of Sher-i-Afghan she lived and worked hard for four long years wearing for herself plain coarse white clothes and giving new dimensions to the textile industry of India. She collected a lot of money for her daughter's marriage and suppressed her own desires and needs relinquishing all pleasures of life. When she assumed the fascinating role of the Empress of India her relatives rose to such tremendous heights as to carve and create a unique history of the Mughal empire.

No Mughal queen either before her or after played such a dominant role as did Nurjahan. But when she married Jahangir in 1611, her vivacity and loveliness along with her innate wisdom and sharp intellect grew with her experience and age. Yet it was beyond her own imagination that for one 'born in the desolate desert', Destiny distinctly planned for her the occupancy of the throne. The tryst made with Destiny flourished and flowered in total fulfilment for her and for the Mughal empire.

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27. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
28. 'Nurjahan and Jahangir', *op. cit.*, p. 5.
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Khafi Khan also narrates this event but gives the credit of bringing back the lucky daughter of Mirza Ghiyas Beg to Malik Masud, the

leader of the Caravan in which Mirza Ghiyas Beg was travelling also, Elphinstone, 'History of India' (ed.), Cowell, p. 554.

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## *From Desert to Throne*

Adventure and excellence marked the charming personality of Meherunnisa. Gifted with innate wisdom, the daughter of Mirza Ghiyas Beg possessed indomitable courage and rare vision. Her elegant form, magic beauty and keen intellect evoked curiosity and interest among the royal youths of the capital city. Mirza Ghiyas Beg gave her the name 'Meherunnisa' which meant 'Sun of women'. She was indeed, exceedingly beautiful. Feminine grace and exuberance were discerned in her soft, dark melting eyes with jetty eyebrows like those of 'a gazelle in love'. But more than the physical charm, she owned a creative mind, sharp intellect, an aesthetic taste and a sober temperament. Her keen sense of perception and deep insight into human temperament were unparalleled. She cultivated refined tastes and pursued art and literature under the affectionate supervision of her wise mother Asmat Begum. Her parents valued her and trained her in royal demeanour. No gift of nature seemed to be wanting in her. Beautiful with the rich beauty of Persia, her soft features were lightened up with a sprightly vivacity and superb loveliness.<sup>1</sup>

Along with her parents, Meherunnisa participated in the celebrations of the Mughal seraglio which echoed with mirth,

song and thrilling dances. She could make her presence felt in the august royal assembly by her exquisitely designed dress, choicest ornaments, scents and embroidered dupattas.<sup>2</sup> The rendering of her own compositions in her sweet melodious voice earned admiration of all present on many a festive occasion and soon did she become the apple of the chief queen's eye. "The daughter of Ghiyas Beg who had been so providentially preserved in the desert, as she grew up excelled in personal attraction all the loveliest women of the East. . . . The child of the desert grew to be the perfection of woman. The greatest care was taken to make her mistress of every accomplishment which could impart additional fascination to the natural graces of her sex. In vivacity, wit, spirit and all those elegant attainments in which women especially excel, she was rivalled by few and surpassed by none."<sup>3</sup>

Mirza Ghiyas Beg who occupied a respectable position among Akbar's nobles, offered paternal love, care and attention to her. He very closely watched the sprouting genius of his lovely yet precocious daughter. When Meherunnisa grew to be a mature dame of fifteen, her parents were convinced of her bright prospects and prosperous future. In her inventive yet contemplative temperament it became definite that she was in distinct contrast to other girls of her age. Ghiyas Beg, therefore, decided to select a warrior of extraordinary calibre to be her life-partner.<sup>4</sup> He selected one brave Persian youth, Ali Quli Istajlu, who had come to India like them to try his luck in the Mughal Court. Mirza Ghiyas Beg himself had left Persia and come to settle in India under the benign patronage of emperor Akbar. He had gradually earned the confidence of emperor Akbar. Known for his chivalry; bravery and refinement, Ali Quli Istajlu drew the attention of Mirza Ghiyas Beg. He consulted his friends as well as the emperor and they all recommended him to be a worthy match to Meherunnisa.<sup>5</sup>

### **Ali Quli Istajlu (Sher-I-Afghan)**

A daring warrior and a man of character, he served the Persian King Shah Ismail as his table attendant. The King loved and valued him. But when Shah Ismail was killed by his enemies, Ali Quli Istajlu did not like to stay in Persia. Surrounded by danger, he had no option other than to proceed to India to save his life and honour.<sup>6</sup> Taking with him all the precious belongings, he migrated to India to try his luck under the patronage of Mughal emperor or his Officers. He faced great difficulties on the rugged path and met with many risks and robbers. But his patience and perseverance bore fruits. He reached Multan and stayed there for some time where he tried to seek favours from the Governor of the Province.<sup>6a</sup>

It was just a coincidence that in 1590 Akbar decided to conquer the southern part of Sind at the mouth of Indus without which his supremacy over North-Western India was incomplete. He made Multan a base of his operation against Qandhar, which was then under the possession of Persia. Akbar had appointed Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khana as the Governor of Multan and issued to him instructions for the siege of Thatta which was under the possession of Mirza Jani Beg—a Persian chief. Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khana waged two wars against Mirza Jani Beg and finally defeated him in 1592 compelling him to surrender the entire territory including the fortresses of Thatta and Sehwan to the Mughals.<sup>7</sup>

During the period of this war, Ali Quli Istajlu had reached Multan. He sought an interview with the Governor, Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khana. To his utter surprise, in the very first meeting he was admitted to the royal service. He joined the ranks of Mughal army and played a remarkable role in the siege of Thatta. The aggressive fight provided him with an opportunity to display his valour and courage. After the conquest of Thatta in 1592, Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khana who had intently marked the valour, courage and intrepidity



of Ali Quli Istajlu sent despatches in Emperor Akbar mentioning about his valour and procured for him a mansab in the Mughal army.<sup>8</sup>

Emperor Akbar was prudent enough to value the brave and talented men irrespective of their nationality. The chronicler records that "The Turkoman (Ali Quli Istajlu) was of lofty stature and no less remarkable for the beauty of his form and features than for the rare qualities of his mind"<sup>9</sup> When Ali Quli Istajlu was introduced to Akbar, he was pleased to grant him royal favours including a befitting and honourable job, on the recommendation of Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khana in 1594.

As Mirza Ghiyas Beg saw the young Persian, he was enamoured by his attractive physique and extra-ordinary tact. He came to know of his noble origin and fame. He developed a liking for Ali Quli Istajlu. Once Mirza Ghiyas Beg took him to Akbar's Court. The young Persian's pleasing manners also impressed the Emperor who openly admired him. The Mirza solicited the permission of the Emperor for marrying his accomplished daughter Meherunnisa to Ali Quli Istajlu.<sup>10</sup> Taking that the marriage of both Meherunnisa and Ali Quli Istajlu was desirable and befitting, Akbar readily granted the necessary permission for it.<sup>11</sup>

After the royal permission, the marriage was solemnized on June 27, 1595, with grace and splendour.<sup>12</sup> Akbar himself attended the wedding rituals of Meherunnisa and Ali Quli Istajlu along with the royal females and offered lavish presents to the couple on the happy occasion. Mirza Ghiyas Beg and his relatives welcomed the Barat and performed all Persian ceremonies bestowing gold, silver, rubies, diamond, sapphires, pearls and valuable robes of velvet and precious utensils on Ali Quli Istajlu. They served lavish preparations in dinner amidst music and dances. Meherunnisa departed from the house of her parents to the house of her husband to start a new life.

The conjugal life of the newly wedded was peaceful and happy.<sup>13</sup> They admired each other, loved each other and understood each other. If Meherunnisa adored her husband's chivalry, Ali Quli Istajlu was enamoured by her charming beauty and inherent qualities of head and heart. Ali Quli Istajlu knew well that her beauty was the theme of universal praise. Yet he was not a jealous husband. He provided all comforts to his lovely wife and led a contented life. In 1597, a lovely daughter was born to them and they called her Ladli Begum. It was the moment of fulfilment in Meherunnisa's life. Ali Quli Istajlu looked after his wife and daughter very well.

In 1599, Ali Quli Istajlu was placed on the staff attached to Prince Salim.<sup>14</sup> When Akbar deputed Salim to wage a campaign against Mewar, Ali Quli escorted him to Rajputana. He single handedly killed a tiger during this expedition. Salim conferred upon him the title of Sher-i-Afghan.<sup>15</sup> He was struck by the physical strength and heroism of Ali Quli Istajlu and was full of admiration for him. When Salim revolted, Sher-i-Afghan fought from his side. But soon he remembered the gestures of Emperor Akbar and then he deserted prince Salim to join Akbar's army. When Akbar died in 1605 and Jahangir ascended the Mughal throne, Sher-i-Afghan was generously awarded an independent Jagir in Burdawan, an important region of Bengal.<sup>16</sup> Jahangir did not feel any grudge against Sher-i-Afghan, though he had left him in crisis.

Being situated far away from Delhi, the region of Bengal had become the hot-bed of sedition, conspiracy and revolt and served as the asylum of disaffected Afghans. When Sher-i-Afghan reached there he tried to control the disturbed situation and establish peace and order.<sup>17</sup> He governed his Jagir of Burdawan amply well and improved the lot of people by his pragmatic economic policies resulting in rapid increase in agriculture production and trade. His wife Meherunnisa took keen interest in the affairs of the state and inspired and

advised Ali Quli Istajlu to govern in the best interest of her people. For some time, peace and tranquillity prevailed. Ali Quli Istajlu as a military commander, organised an efficient and loyal army under his leadership.<sup>18</sup>

In Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, it is so mentioned that, 'Ali Quli Istajlu was sufrachi (table servant) to Shah Ismail I ruler of Iran; after his death he took to flight through his natural wickedness and habit of making mischief, and came to Qandahar, and having met at Multan the Khankhana, who had been appointed to the charge of the province of Tulamba started with him for that province. The Khankhana in the field placed him among the servants of the late king (Akbar), and he having performed services in that campaign was promoted to a rank in accordance with his condition, and was for a long time in the service of my revered father. At the time when he (Akbar) went in prosperity to the provinces of the Deccan, and I was ordered against the Rana, he came and became servant to me. I gave him the title of Sher-i-Afghan (Tiger-throwing). When I came from Allahabad to wait on my revered father, on account of the unfriendliness that was shown to me, most of my attendants and people were scattered abroad, and he also at that time chose to leave my service. After my accession, out of generosity I overlooked his offences, and gave an order for a Jagir for him in the Subah of Bengal.'<sup>19</sup>

After Raja Man Singh came back to Agra in 1606 and Qutubuddin was appointed the Governor of Bengal in his place, situation there grew from bad to worse. Though a relative of Jahangir, he was a corrupt and idle fellow and he became jealous of the popularity of Ali Quli Istajlu at Burdawan. When the news came to him that Ali Quli Istajlu had a strong army, he began to apprehend some danger from him and complained against him to Jahangir. On Qutubuddin's apprehensions Jahangir ordered that Ali Quli Istajlu should be a once sent to Agra.<sup>20</sup>

Sher-i-Afghan knew nothing about the events and that

he was being suspected of treason by the new Governor of Bengal, Qutubuddin Khan. He was also ignorant about any imperial orders calling for his personal audience at the royal court. In response to the Governor's summons, Sher-i-Afghan, accompanied by two servants, reached Qutubuddin's camp on April 9, 1607. To his utter surprise, he was immediately surrounded by the Governor's troops. Taken a back and realizing the danger and the indignity to which he was subjected, he angrily enquired of Qutubuddin as to why he was being treated in that manner. Qutubuddin proceeded to explain the matter but the infuriated Sher-i-Afghan struck the governor with his sword.<sup>21</sup> Qutubuddin's followers fell upon Sher-i-Afghan and cut him to pieces. But before this, Sher-i-Afghan had given a mortal blow to Amba Khan, one of the Governor's trusted retainer. Both he and the Governor died within twelve hours of the incident.<sup>22</sup>

Tujuk-i-Jahangiri mentions the incident of the killing of Sher-i-Afghan with a feeling of contempt for him. Jahangir records the incident under the impression that Sher-i-Afghan actually challenged his authority and he was really a criminal. In the end he remarks that, "what can I write of this unpleasantness? How grieved and troubled I became! Qutubuddin Khan Koka was to me in the place of a dear son, a kind brother and a congenial friend. What can one do with the decrees of God? Bowing to destiny I adopted an attitude of resignation."<sup>23</sup> In fact no historical evidence is available to prove that Jahangir had ordered for the murder of Sher-i-Afghan. He issued only an order of sending him to Agra if found guilty of treason.

What actually came about of this ghastly incident was mutual mistrust, jealousy, rivalry and intrigue. Many historians like Ishwari Prasad and A.L. Srivastava have alleged Jahangir of being a party to Sher-i-Afghan's murder. But the circumstantial evidence leads safely to conclude Jahangir's neutrality in the entire incident.<sup>24</sup> Yet, the death of Sher-i-Afghan closed one chapter in Nurjahan's life. She was left all alone with a female child in the arms and in midst of

enemies and intriguers. She was rudely shocked over the untoward incident. She was determined to stand upon her own feet and nurse and nourish her child. She was determined to combat the inimical forces. Jealousy and rivalry spoilt a happy home. Meherunnisa fell prey to such circumstances as rendered her homeless.

Assessing the character and achievements of Sher-i-Afghan, it is beyond doubt that he bore a high character. He enjoyed a position of honour and repute. As long as he lived, his conjugal life was happy and peaceful. He immensely loved his wife Meherunnisa and his child Ladli Begum. He lived upto the parameters of an ideal Islamic marriage. Amidst moments of contentment with a life partner who was beauty and wisdom personified, he enjoyed rare domestic bliss. Nurjahan looked after him lovingly and inspired him to be further daring, courageous, adventurous and ambitious. In the union of Sher-i-Afghan and Meherunnisa, bravery and beauty superbly interacted in a manner that not only each compensated the other but also set an ideal. In no way, the conjugal life of Sher-i-Afghan and Meherunnisa lacked warmth and emotions.

After the calamity, Meherunnisa alongwith her young daughter left for Agra. Her father Mirza Ghiyas Beg, and brother Asaf Khan held high positions in the capital. But Nurjahan was a woman who held her self respect supreme. Besides, she did not like to be a burden upon her relatives. She decided to take up a job in the royal palace.<sup>25</sup> Jahangir was informed that the widow of Sher-i-Afghan and her daughter had reached Agra. He did not feel inclined even to allow Meherunnisa the privilege of seeing him. He immediately ordered that she may be assigned the job of serving the Dowager queen who was not keeping well. Meherunnisa was given a very ordinary accommodation meant for those who served the royal family. She accepted the job and became lady in waiting to Saleema Begum who was very kind and affectionate to her. Through her dedication, sincerity and simplicity, she won the admiration of the mother queen.

She lived in the harem in mourning and seclusion. She did not join any royal celebrations held at Agra Fort. She led a simple life and spent her time in Ibaadat and other religious activities. But her education, vision and talent impelled her to leave the seclusion and join with many who were not very happy in the royal Harem. She started teaching literature and Koran to young girls at the harem.<sup>26</sup> She popularized embroidery and sewing and stitching among young women. In her free time she collected the women of the harem and taught them handicrafts. Women who had no royal lineage specially flocked round her and spent time in knitting, sewing, designing and embroidery industry which Meherunnisa started in her apartments.<sup>27</sup> She gradually brought about a transformation in the environment of the Mughal harem.

Meherunnisa's embroidery work of Zari and Kimkhab soon made her famous. Her proud temperament would not permit to seek anybody's help. She worked with soft but skilful fingers. She painted silks and carved embroidery and sold them to the women of harem in the Mina Bazar. The role of queen mother was no less significant in encouraging Nurjahan to be self-dependent. She insisted upon her to cast off the veil of sadness and come out to join the women of the Mughal Harem during fairs and festivals. Francois Bernier provides the description of the fairs when he writes that, "A whimsical kind of fair is sometimes held during, these festivities in the Mahal or royal seraglio; it is conducted by the handsomest and most engaging wives of the Omrahs and principal Mansabdars. The articles exhibited are beautiful brocades, rich embroideries of the newest fashion, turbans elegantly worked on cloth of gold, fine muslin worn by women of quality and other articles of high price. These bewitching females act the part of traders, while the purchasers are the king, Begums, or princesses and other distinguished ladies of the seraglio. If any Omrah's wife happens to have a handsome daughter, she never fails to accompany her mother that she may be seen, by the king and become known to the Begums."<sup>28</sup> On one such occasion in 1611, Jahangir saw

Meherunnisa and fell in love with her.<sup>29</sup> It was the New Year's Day (Iqbal Nama, p. 56) when he married her on 14th Khurdad.<sup>29A</sup>

### Jahangir

Jahangir married Meherunnisa on 25th May, 1611.<sup>30</sup> At the time of the marriage, Nurjahan was thirty-four years of age and Jahangir was forty-two. Jahangir, after marrying her, gave her the title of Nur Mahal (light of the Palace). Five years later, in March, 1616, he bestowed upon her the title of Nur Jahan (Light of the World).<sup>31</sup> She also won in 1622 the most enviable but well deserved title of "Padshah Begum" or the first Lady of the Realm.<sup>32</sup>

According to Hawkins when Nurjahan entered Jahangir's palace, he already had 300 wives, of which four were chief queens.<sup>33</sup> Beni Prasad, however, thinks that "the monstrous number of 300" included the concubines also.<sup>34</sup> Soon after her marriage, Nurjahan began to occupy a very special place in the heart of the Emperor and thus grew to be the first lady of the imperial seraglio. Public opinion did not fail to notice her phenomenal rise and acquisition of power. Nurjahan received from her royal husband grants of land, gifts of gold and jewels, and unaccounted treasures. She also got gifts and presents from Indian Rajas and foreign merchants. The Jagirs which the emperor granted her spread all over the country and would have got her the title of a commander of 30,000.<sup>35</sup> Her large Jagir of Ramsar was situated about 30 kilometers south-east of Ajmer.<sup>36</sup> In 1617, on the happy occasion of Shahjahan's victory in the Deccan, Nurjahan was given the pargana of toda to be her Jagir. It lay 80 kilometers south-east of Ajmer on the trade route from Surat to Agra and brought her an annual income of two lakhs of rupees.<sup>37</sup> She also received the right of collecting octroi duty at Sikandara-bad on the merchandise coming from the eastern sector of the country such as Allahabad, Bihar, Orissa, Bengal and Bhutan, where officers of Nurjahan Begum built their Sarais to collect

duties on all these goods and also on innumerable kinds of grain, butter and other provisions, produced in these provinces. These goods were also imported from there.<sup>38</sup> Her income from cesses and octroi duties was enormous.<sup>39</sup>

Nurjahan's fertile brain prompted her to have control on foreign trade which at the time was in flourishing condition. Indian ships carried from India textiles, spices, ginger, pepper, dyes, opium and various other drugs to West Asian countries like Arabia, Persia, North Africa, and brought back wines, perfumes, brocade, China goods, gold, silver, ivory, amber, pearls and horses.<sup>40</sup>

Nurjahan maintained a number of ships and carried on foreign trade mainly in indigo and embroidered cloth. Her commercial enterprises brought her immense profits. Many European trading Companies like the Portuguese, Dutch and English were at this time busy in commercial activity in India. Nurjahan's relations with the English were good but while protecting English goods and their interests, her own self-interest was supreme with her. She had to compromise with the fact that the Emperor, his mother and many other members of the royal family were all trading on their own account. Nurjahan could not monopolize any item of trade nor could she ignore the Portuguese completely. She had to cooperate with the Portuguese at Daman and Diu, who were carrying on brisk trade between India and the Western countries and her shipmen had to pay customs to the Portuguese.<sup>41</sup> Her relations with the English merchants were on a better footing and sometimes she issued orders granting them tax concessions. She sent her goods in English ships, preferring them to those of the Portuguese with whom the Mughal relations were not good.<sup>42</sup>

Nurjahan managed 'Firmans' for the English traders conferring upon them many concessions. Gifts and presents were exchanged between the English and the royal family.<sup>43</sup> Nurjahan was not only a consort of the king but also the



queen de facto. This fact too helped her enrich her coffers through Nazars and presents from countries. She obtained a lot of wealth from presents and offerings. Her influence gradually grew to be supreme in the Mughal empire. Her riches knew no bounds. But she preferred to spend her money for good causes and charity.

Nurjahan was a woman of varied interest. She was talented and cultured, intelligent and ready witted. She loved refinement and shared with Jahangir his love of arts and ornamentation. She possessed skilful taste in adorning apartments and arranging feasts. In the setting of the harem, Nurjahan expressed her feelings and experiences through poetry. She composed verses in Persian language. Khafi Khan quotes some of her verses which pulsate with feelings of intense love, despondency, suffering, and Sufi sentiments.<sup>44</sup> She presented the rare combination of a realist poet, an idealist visionary and a practical administrator. She was interested in fine arts like poetry and painting and she patronized architecture and gardening. She was also an accomplished horse-rider and an excellent shot.<sup>45</sup> As an empress, Nurjahan represented the excellence in medieval Indo-Iranian culture.

The greatest merit of Nurjahan Begum was her devotion to her husband. Jahangir's health, badly shattered on account of excessive drinking was soothed on many occasions by her healing touch. She loved and nursed him not only as his wife but at times also as his mother.<sup>46</sup> Jahangir was totally dependent upon her and she performed her duties towards her husband admirably well.

In the congenial setting of the new family ties with the royal lineage, Nurjahan's talents blossomed as she got ample opportunities to realize her true self. She was born to rule and lead the people and was indeed the Empress incarnate.

When she indulged in politics, she exhibited the best in

the art of state-craft. Her political insight was superb and matchless. Jahangir understood her calibre and left the empire in her safe hands. But political power was not acquired by Nurjahan through any manouvering or machinations. It was bestowed upon her by a loving husband who was convinced of her political insight and merit.

Nurjahan's glory never vanished. Beauty and romance manifested in her person during adolescence. Power and magnificance graced her rule in her mature age, when she reached the stage of perfect womanhood. She wielded power when she possessed it. She renounced it when she was dispossess and yet she never lamented upon what she lost. She never compromised with her dignity and honour whether in power or out of it. Never before history produced a woman of such a strong will and inner strength who was not ruffled with the signs of time.

Born in the desert, Destiny made her to climb the throne in a masterly style. She did not have the sense of any inferiority of being a woman or the 'weaker sex'. Rather she came out victorious by using her best skill in hours of crisis. She lived to work in the best interest of her husband.

She adorned the harem with a superb and sensitive sense of a mistress who won the admiration of one and all. The Mughal harem of her time did not remain to be only the resort of sensuous pleasure seekers and cheap entertainment. On the other hand it was changed into a creative and constructive place. She made it an enlightened campus where suppressed feminism found eloquent expression under her dynamic leadership. Not only that she fully transformed the inner life of the Mughal harem, but also adorned it with fresh hue and colour.

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## *Inside Harem*

Fact and fiction mingled in a way to weave a web of romance, around Nurjahan. Yet she was never a romantic dame. She was a mature and unadorned woman who lived and died more as a realist than as an idealist. The God-inspired old woman of the Harem had prophesied to her, "You were born in a desert to sit upon the throne, the stars so puny at your birth will expand into a Sun." She herself never knew that a grand future awaited for her when she sought employment in the harem with a female child in her arms and in the state of widowhood. The emperor had refused to see her. He of course issued orders that she be appointed as an attendant upon his step mother, Saleema Begum. She as an attendant was confined in one of the worst apartments of the harem.

The Mughal Harem was the seat of culture and refinement since the time of Akbar. The Mughal princes and other promising youths among the nobles were educated in the harem to hold the posts of responsibility in the empire.<sup>1</sup> The location of the Harem was not within the royal abode but at a little distance from it. No one was admitted to its apartments except the Emperor and the officers attached to it.<sup>2</sup>

All duties in the harem were performed by women or aunuchs.<sup>3</sup> The harem was enclosed by lofty walls and surrounded by spacious gardens laid out with all the splendour of eastern magnificence where every luxury was available.<sup>4</sup> The inmates were the wives and maid servants of the royal men.<sup>5</sup> They could not go out except when the emperor took them in his travels and war camps. They travelled in covered palanquins and small covered boats. The apartments of the harem were splendid where they lived almost in captivity<sup>6</sup>. All the inmates of the harem could not be provided with separate, splendid and spacious dwellings in the harem. The queens and princesses of status were allotted magnificent palaces according to their rank and income. But the ladies in waiting, companions, musicians, dancing girls, maids, concubines and slave girls were accommodated in verandahas, dark and tiny apartments, dormitories, kiosks and cottages.<sup>7</sup>

### As Meherunnisa

She joined the Harem as Meherunnisa after her return to Agra to be the personal attendant of Dowager Queen Saleema Sultana Begum who was Jahangir's step mother.<sup>8</sup> Nurjahan still lamented the death of her brave husband. She felt the pangs of the grim turn in her fortune and her personal bereavement. From the position of an honoured housewife, she was reduced to the status of a petty attendant. She reigned in her own house and over the heart of her husband for whom she bore a child. Her inherent excellence and talents found due recognition and encouragement by her loving husband. In turn she admired his extra ordinary valour. The conjugal life was compatible though the tastes and temperament were diametrically opposite. The tie of love was strong enough to bind them together in a successful matrimony.

Meherunnisa, therefore, could not forget Ali Quli Istajlu and mourned the irreparable loss with deep sorrow and in white clothes for four years and some months. She was not in a fit state of mind to adjust with the usual gaiety and mirth that prevailed in the Harem.<sup>9</sup> Reconciliation to this

sort of life was difficult for her and all this time she lived as an insignificant being. She had cast off the black robe of mourning to wear the coarse white of the deepening separation.

Meherunnisa found in the harem an environment not congenial to her temperament and demeanour. She also knew that life outside the harem would neither suit her nor would provide her any security. Under the adverse circumstances she considered herself to be safer in the harem than in the house of her own relatives. Besides as a self-respecting woman a liberated soul as she was, she did not like to live at the mercy of others. Jahangir remained indifferent to her till the nobles of the empire began sending messages to Meherunnisa for her hand in marriage.<sup>10</sup> But she remained firm, unaffected and unmoved. She devoted most of her time and energy to her aesthetic pursuits composing poetry in Persian.<sup>11</sup> She kept herself busy in manufacturing garments and beautiful handicrafts for her cottage industry which had been firmly established by then.

She had an extraordinarily fertile brain and she used it in creative activity. She was dexterous at making tapestry and all kinds of attractive embroidery. She could paint silk with richest devices.<sup>12</sup> In the harem, she worked hard to earn money out of her own labour and hard work. She applied herself with great assiduity to the work she undertook and acquired efficiency to transcend the works of best manufacturers of the empire.<sup>13</sup> In a short span, her craftsmanship earned for her a matchless reputation. The exquisite productions of her taste and skill captured the mind of the nobles and the business magnets who gave currency in the capital to the items produced under her supervision and guidance.

As Sher-i-Afghan's widow she lived in isolation but as a genius crafts-person she proved her worth and demonstrated her excellence. The noble women at the court of Delhi

and Agra were nothing on festive occasions other than what Meherunnisa designed and produced.<sup>14</sup> She was acknowledged throughout the empire as the oracle of fashion and taste. She attired her own attendants in the richest tissues and brocades by earning through labour. She had gradually established her own industry assisted by the women of the harem who had ample time to devote to work. She herself toiled hard day and night with firm faith in God. When she got tired, she organized Mushairas.

An ideal woman as Nurjahan aspired to be, she kept herself busy and was totally dedicated to work. It would be no exaggeration to assert that she changed the entire atmosphere of the Harem.<sup>15</sup> The women of the harem learnt the dignity of labour under her inspiration. Loathed in captivity, they could not realize their own identity but for her who taught them to live as 'individuals' rather than as non-entities. She shared the spirit of feminism and advised them not to submerge their identity in those of others. She herself saw in the harem the plight of the wretched women. When voices ceased to impart delight, when faded cheeks and sharpened tongues did not attract the lovers, when warmth of love subsided with fading beauty and charm, 'the roses withered and lost their sweetness'. Nurjahan's industry of painting, embroidery and scent making gave a new meaning of life to more than three hundred women of the Harem. She infused a new life and vigour in such disappointed women as, forced by circumstances, were left with no option other than to sink deep in oblivion. For them life had been a sordid story of deceit and exploitation under the spell of a feudal system. They were mentally deranged and they thought themselves to be a burden when they had to face adverse psychological moments.<sup>16</sup> In Meherunnisa these women found a benefactor and a saviour and she emerged as a great moral force for the women in the Harem. 'It was probably with the entry of the ambitious and talented Nurjahan into the Mughal harem, that the change began to take place. She and her family exercised immeasurable influence in the Mughal court and harem in Jahangir's time.'<sup>17</sup>



Meherunnisa had her own life style. She always upheld her self respect and pride and remained quiet and sober. She did not accept the allowance sanctioned by the Treasury for attending the Dowager Empress. She preferred to live in her modest apartment and served her mistress with all sincerity and devotion without accepting any thing in return. Saleema Begum began to value and adore her for her upright conduct and pious character. She helped her in developing her livelihood. Her sewing and embroidery were sold in the popular market of Kinari Bazar Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore and Delhi.<sup>18</sup>

Her beauty and talent became the theme of a general approbation beyond the precincts of the royal harem.<sup>19</sup> Nobles of high distinction began to propose their hand to her. Meherunnisa bluntly declined their proposals. One of them even violated the sanctity of the royal harem and took an opportunity stealthily enter her apartment. Deeply offended and filled with indignation, she thrust a dagger in his breast giving him the lesson of his life.<sup>20</sup> Her fame began to echo in and outside the Palace for the strength of her character and integrity.

The saga of Meherunnisa's accomplished achievements and traits of her character reached the ears of Jahangir. The Emperor desired to see her but she was not willing for it. Saleema Begum ordered Meherunnisa to participate in the fair and 'Jashan' of Meena Bazar<sup>\*21</sup>. On the New Year's celebrations, Jahangir found the widow Meherunnisa clad in white muslim of very ordinary quality in the midst of women, high and low, but all dressed in high class ceremonial attires. She was so absorbed in the work assigned to her that she did not notice the entry of the Emperor. As he saw her he was dazzled by the perfection of her form and the dignity of her demeanour<sup>22</sup> Meherunnisa rose from her seat and offered her Aadab to him. She stood there and awaited his command. The emperor saw that she was not an ordinary woman. He was reminded of the tragic circumstances which forced her to come to the royal court at Agra. He knew well that the self-

respecting woman had preferred the life of renunciation and dedication. He offered his hand to her sincerely and she accepted it with humility. A proclamation was issued for the celebration of their marriage.<sup>23</sup> The marriage was performed with simplicity and dignity. She was named Nur Mahal after marriage. In the climax of her exaltation, she was renamed Nurjahan and was proclaimed as the Queen Empress of India.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of this communion, her family was held next in the rank to the royalty. The members of the family were promoted to the posts of highest responsibility and were admitted to high privileges and profits of the royal living.

### As Nurjahan

As an Empress, the span of her work was naturally enlarged but it did not deter her from her devotion to aesthetics and promotion of culture. She continued adorning apartments and arranging feasts, in inventing styles of dress, costumes and jewellery and perfumes.<sup>25</sup> She discarded old designs of clothes which were inconvenient to wear and instead designed new patterns. In place of the 'Peshwaz' or ladies gown, she introduced a very light dress called 'dudami' which weighed just two dams.<sup>26</sup> Her 'panchtoliya' a scraf weighing only five tolas, too was a light substitute for headcover or 'orhani'.<sup>27</sup> Her new fashions in 'badla' (brocade) and kinari (lace) and above all her farsh-i-Chandni or sandalwood coloured carpets, became famous in her own time. Nurjahan also "laid down new patterns and elegant designs for many gold ornaments".<sup>28</sup> The itr-i-gulab (perfume of rose) which was also known as itr-i-Jahangiri, became very popular. Jahangir himself mentions about this innovation in his autobiography.<sup>29</sup>

Nurjahan proved to be an accomplished counterpart to her cultured and literary husband. An empress, she organized

garden parties at the instance of her husband who loved gaiety, merriment, feasting, music and exchange of costly presents. In his Tujuk, Jahangir himself describes many such parties. He records a memorable party at Malwa when he held "a meeting in one of the houses of the palace of Nurjahan Begum which was situated in the midst of large tanks and invited the Amirs and Courtiers to the feast which had been prepared by the Begum."<sup>30</sup> According to him there were all kinds of intoxicating drinks, all sorts of roast meats and fruits. He records further that, "After three or four Gharis of night had passed, I dismissed the men and summoned the ladies and till a watch of the night passed the time in this delightful place."<sup>31</sup>

Nurjahan introduced Persian style of life in the harem. She arranged a grand dinner in 1617 on the occasion of prince Khurram's victory in Deccan. She arranged a grand banquet and conferred on the prince dresses of honour of great value and other decent presents. She also gave gifts to Mumtaj Mahal, other ladies of his harem, his children and servants.<sup>32</sup>

The entire environment of the royal harem was miraculously transformed by Nurjahan. The songs and dances, mirth and fleshy festivals were replaced by artistic celebrations and refined creativity.<sup>33</sup> The Persian culture pervaded the Mughal harem life. Nurjahan as the representative of the new culture introduced the art of gracious living among the inmates. She improved the quality of their dress, the delicacy of their cuisine and the elegance of their speech. The enthusiasm in music and poetry marked her and the etiquette and elegance of the harem were all Persian in character.<sup>34</sup>

Though firm and steadfast as an empress, Nurjahan was an affectionate woman who treated every member of the royal harem with decency, compassion and courtesy. She protected the women from tyranny and oppression. Her charity was boundless. "If ever she learnt that any orphan girl was destitute and friendless," writes a Persian chronicler, "she would bring about her marriage and give her a wedding portion."<sup>35</sup>

Her reputation for compassion had spread far and wide. Many of the Persian chroniclers have noted that Nurjahan won golden opinions from the people. She was liberal and just to all who begged her support. She was an asylum for all sufferers and helpless girls were married at the expense of her private purse. She must have portioned about 500 girls in her life time and thousands were grateful for her generosity.<sup>36</sup> Most of the girls were maid servants of the harem and she married them off to Ahadis (gentlemen troopers). She also sent many persons to Muslim holy places like Mecca, Karbala and Najaf on pilgrimage. On prescribed days of bath, she would distribute three thousand rupees in alms.<sup>37</sup>

Jahangir mentions in his Memoirs that Nurjahan was an excellent horse-rider and an excellent shot. In 1616 when Jahangir was camping near Ajmer, she shot a bird called 'Orisha' the like of which for (small) size and beauty of colour had never been seen; it weighted only about 200 grams. And the next year, she shot four tigers in a row.<sup>38</sup> "When the tigers came in sight", writes Jahangir, "Nurjahan Begum submitted that if I would order her she herself would kill the tigers with her gun. I said, 'Let it be so'. She shot two tigers with one shot each and knocked life out of the bodies of the four tigers. Until now such shooting was never seen, that from the top of an elephant and inside of a howdah (amari) six shots should be made and not one miss, so that the four beasts found no opportunity to spring or move. As a reward for this good shooting I gave her a pair of bracelets (pahunchi) of diamonds worth 1,00,000 rupees and scattered 1,000 ashrafis (over her)."<sup>39</sup> The feat was indeed marvellous. On another occasion, in 1619, when Jahangir was in Mathura, the huntsmen represented that there was in that neighbourhood a tiger that greatly troubled and injured the ryots and wayfarers. Jahangir again notes ; "I immediately ordered them to bring together a number of elephants and surround the forest and at the end of the day myself rode out with my ladies. As I had vowed that I would not injure any living thing with my own hand, I told Nurjahan to shoot at him. An

elephant is not at ease when it smells a tiger and is continually in movement, and to hit with a gun from a litter (amari) is a very difficult matter. Yet Nurjahan so hit the tiger with one shot that it was immediately killed.<sup>40</sup>

As a wife, Nurjahan served Jahangir with devotion and dedication. She nursed him in his ailments like a mother.<sup>41</sup> She provided healthy entertainment to him and did not allow him any excesses. Excessive drinking had spoilt Jahangir's health and there were many occasions when Nurjahan's healing touch alone helped Jahangir to recover.<sup>42</sup> In 1614, he fell ill with fever, headache and rashes on the skin. Thinking that "some injury might occur to country", writes he in his *Memoirs*, "I kept this secret and did not inform the physicians and Hakims...and only imparted this to Nurjahan Begum."<sup>43</sup> It took Jahangir twenty-two days to recover during which Nurjahan nursed him with utmost devotion. From 1621 onwards her nursing alone could save him from disaster. Jahangir narrates the account in an emotional style." When the weather became hot, the evil effects of this increased, and my weakness and laboured breathing were augmented. Nurjahan Begum, whose skill and experience are greater than those of physicians, especially as they are brought to bear through affection and sympathy, endeavoured to...carry out the remedies that appeared appropriate to the time, and soothing to the condition. She, by degree, lessened my wine and kept me from things that did not suit me and food that disagreed with me."<sup>44</sup> During fifteen years of married life with Jahangir, Nurjahan served her husband with all care and love. She attended upon him with heart and soul. In the royal harem Jahangir trusted no one more than his beloved wife, Nurjahan. A man who was given to pleasure and drinking was much contained by Nurjahan and she conquered and improved him with her supreme love and extended mother-like care to him.<sup>45</sup>

In the polygamous household,<sup>46</sup> the conjugal life of Nurjahan and Jahangir set an example of singular love and devotion. Nurjahan excelled all women in her concern and

devotion for Jahangir. She laid down a healthy and whole some tradition for other women of the harem to follow. Dr. Beni Prasad writes, "In many respects they differed from each other and therefore, supplemented each other. Their close intimacy resulted as much from the attraction of opposites as from similarity of aim and outlook."<sup>47</sup>

It was from the royal harem that the celebrated decrees were fulminated, for though they passed in the Emperor's name, it is creditly attested that they emanated from his Sultana, which rendered the reign of Jahangir one of the most politically prosperous in the annals of Muhammeden history. Her influence exceeded that of any other person in the empire, not even excepting the sovereign; and perhaps, under the rigid scrupulosity of Mughal policy with regard to women sharing in the administration of the state, there never has been an instance of one of the sex attaining an ascendancy so paramount, and such perfect political control over the destinies of so many subject principalities as the renowned Nurjahan.<sup>48</sup>

The harem, since its inception, was a queer establishment where in royal mothers and aunts, sisters and cousins, wives and concubines, princesses and minor princes, dancing-girls and maids, besides of course choicest beauties for the master's pleasure all lived under one roof as if in a joint family. Nurjahan, as a queen, not only looked after the comforts of Jahangir but also looked to the requirements of every member of the royal harem.<sup>49</sup> Under her care and attention every woman had a distinct role to play and each was treated with deference, admiration, adoration and strictness as was her due. She completely renovated the administrative set up of the Harem which developed into an elegant and sophisticated institution. Nurjahan exercised influence in the harem because of her concern for every minute detail in every day life. Right from 1611 to 1622, she contributed her best to the well being and requirement of the royal harem.

Nurjahan did not observe Purda. Under her influence the ladies of the harem visited sacred places like the tombs of Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia at Delhi and Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer. Nurjahan herself visited the sacred tombs and fulfilled her 'minnat' by offering 'Chadar' at the tombs. She offered prayers and paid huge sums to the caretakers.<sup>50</sup> Her inspiration were Sultana Saleema Begum and Mariyam-uz-Zamani, who had always kept themselves busy in pious activities.<sup>51</sup>

In the elitist society of the royal harem where royalty and nobility indulged in pleasure, Nurjahan laid emphasis on the chastity of women. Most of the functions like weighing ceremonies, marriages of royalty, Nauroz and even the Khushroz bazaar were organised during day time.<sup>52</sup> Nurjahan used to entertain her husband for his health and happiness. On way to Kashmir, she entertained Jahangir in the Sarai Nur Mahal which she had built at Jalandhar.<sup>53</sup>

Nurjahan married her daughter Ladli Begum to Jahangir's son Shaharyar and organised a grand function with hinnabandi (putting on henna) and nikah. Jahangir himself mentions, 'The feast of the Nikah was held in the house of Itimad-ud-daula. I myself went there with the ladies and adorned the feast of joy, in the Nur Afshan garden. I presented my son Shaharyar with a jewelled charquab (coat), with a turban, waist-belt and two horses—one an Iraqi with a gold saddle and the other Turki with an embroidered saddle.'<sup>54</sup> Nurjahan arranged a lavish feast, and offered ornaments, horses and other precious presents to the bride groom. The function was marked with procession, music, dance and fireworks.

In January 1622, Itimad-ud-daula breathed his last.<sup>55</sup> Nurjahan who was much attached to her father, then experienced the sour tastes of life. Apparently she maintained calm and patience but she felt that her position weakened specially when Jahangir's health failed day by day. The events unfolded:

to her the complexities of royal life. She lost her mother Asmat Begum in 1921 who was a sagacious lady. Khurram killed Khusrav in Deccan the same year and Nurjahan begum to apprehend danger from his side.

The royal harem with tremendous establishment and expenditure was a kingdom in itself and Nurjahan, inspite of her best efforts could not change its scenario. After 1922 she remained solely attached to her husband whose health deteriorated fast. She celebrated all functions of the harem with pomp and gaiety specially the birth day of Jahangir when he was yearly weighed and account was kept thereof by his physicians to guess his bodily state.<sup>56</sup>

A contemporary traveller describes Jahangir's birth day which Nurjahan celebrated with great enthusiasm alongwith other ladies of the harem. He narrates that, "The king's birth-day and the solemnity of his weighing to which I went... was carried into a very large and beautiful garden...where was prepared the scale, being hung in large trestles, and a cross-beam...the seals of massy gold, the borders set with small stones...the chains of gold large and massy...Here attended the nobility, all sitting about on carpets (and the ladies watched from behind the curtains'. The king...appeared clothed, or rather laden with diamonds, rubies, pearls and other precious vanities, so great, so glorious; (He was weighed) with gold and jewels...Then against cloth of gold, silk, stuffs, linen, spices...Lastly, against meal, butter, corn...and all the rest of the stuff...At night he drinketh with all his nobility in rich plates."<sup>57</sup>

Other festivals like Nauroz or the New Year's day were celebrated in the royal harem at the advent of spring for eighteen or nineteen days when 'wine flowed in rivulets. verse and ode flew in hundred, gaiety and merriment ruled everything while dance and music thrilled the hearts of all."



Nurjahan issued official orders from the royal harem and she shared this privilege with Jahangir as his empress. Other official documents like *hasbul-hukm*, *Nishans*, *sanads* and *parwanas* were issued by her. But it was an authority bestowed upon her by Jahangir and she was under his command. She also appeared in *Jharokha-i-Darshan* with Jahangir. She had her own *vakils*, *Nazirs* and other officers to manage her state.<sup>58</sup>

Yet Nurjahan's greatest contribution to harem life was her conduct of conjugal love in a place where sexual licence, suppression and polygamous pattern dominated the life of women. Under her impact, Jahangir banned the use of tobacco in 1617 and himself lessened the use of liquor. She made the royal harem a fashionable place with magnificent clothes, costly jewelleryes, rubies and pearls, where women were inspired to be flaming torches of love, fellowship and chastity.

Under Nurjahan's care and control the royal harem helped in the continuation and preservation of a composite culture specially in the presence of the Rajput queens with whom her relations were cordial and friendly. The dress, manners, the royal cuisine and dishes, the elegance of language and sophisticated behaviour marked the inside life of the harem. These brought about such a synthesis and amity as left its imprint on the contemporary society and polity.

## References

1. K.S. Lal, 'The Mughal Harem', New Delhi, 1988, p. 205.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.
3. Manucci Scoria dt Mogor (Trans. W. Irvine) Vol. II, pp. 352-57.
4. *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. I (Trans. Blochmann & ed. Phillot) Calcutta, 1939, p. 46.
5. Vincent Smith writes, "The imperial harem constituted a town in itself. The maintenance and control of such a multitude of women

necessitated a carefully devised system of internal administration and the organization of adequate arrangements for discipline."

—Akbar the Great Mughal, pp. 260-61 (Oxford, 1919).

6. K S. Lal, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.
7. Falk Toby and Digby Simon, *Paintings from Mughal India* London, Plate 31.
8. Saleema Begum was the widow of Bairam Khan whom Akbar had married. She was the daughter of Gulrukh Begum and the grand daughter of Babar and was probably a few years senior to Akbar. Jahangir praises her for natural qualities and acquirements. She created an impression of herself as charming and cultivated woman.  
—K.S. Lal *op. cit.*, p. 26.
9. In the royal harem extensive use of gold and silver utensils was made. Pelsaert says, 'their Mahals are adorned internally with superfluous pomp and ornamental dainties betraying inflated pride; Their bedsteads were lavishly ornamented with gold and silver.'  
—Pelsaert, *Francisco, Jahangir's India*, Trans. from Remonstrant by Moreland and Geyl, Cambridge, 1925, pp. 64-65. see also M. Manucci, *Storia de Mogor* trans. by W. Irvine, Vol. I, p. 87 (London 1906).
10. Nurjahan and Jahangir, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
11. Khafi Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-71.
12. K.S. Lal, *op. cit.* p. 76.
13. Nurjahan & Jahangir, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.
14. Nurjahan & Jahangir, *op. cit.* p. 36.
15. K.S. Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
16. K.S. Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
18. Nurjahan and Jahangir, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-39.
19. *Ibid*, p. 39.
20. *Ibid*, p. 39.
- \* Mina Bazar or Khushfroz were started by Akbar.
21. Motamid Khan Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri (Persian), p. 55.
22. Della Valle, *Travels*, pp. 53-54.
23. Husaini Kamgar, *Maasir-i-Jahangiri*, Ed. Alavi Azra (Persian), p. 143.
24. Coryal Thomas—*Early Travels*, p. 279.
25. K.S. Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

28. Hendley, 'Indian Jewellery', Vol. I, p. 10.
29. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-71.
30. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 385-86.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 386.
32. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 397.
33. Mannuci, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 22-37.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Khafi Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 405.
36. Muhammad Hadi, Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, (E. & D.), Vol. VI, p. 399.
37. Shah Nawaz Khan, Maasir-ul-Umra (Trans.) Vol. II, pp. 107-8.
38. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, p. 348.
39. *Ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 375.
40. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 104-5.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.
43. *Ibid.*, Vol. I., pp. 266-67.
44. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 213-14.
45. William Hawkins, 'Early Travels', *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.  
Also see K.S. Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
46. The Muslim tradition approves four wives but Jahangir like other Mughal Emperors, married many wives. He did not agree to the monogamous practice advocated by the Jesuits.  
C.H. Payne, 'Jahangir and the Jesuits', London 1930, pp. 67-69.
47. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-82.
48. The caption of the edicts were :  
Ba Hukum Shah Jahangir Yaft Sad Zewar.  
Ba Naam Nurjahan Badshah Begum Zar.  
(By orders of the king Jahangir gold has a hundred splendours added to it by receiving the name Nurjahan the queen Begum).
49. Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri (E. & D ) *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 398.
50. Tajuki-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 110.
51. K S. Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
52. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78, 111, 115 and 239.
53. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 385-86.
54. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 199-202.
55. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp 325-326.
56. Terry, 'Early Travels in India (Ed. W. Foster), p. 328.
57. Thomas Roe, 'The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mughal (1615-1619) (Ed. W. Foster), pp. 411-13.
58. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 92.

## *Fulfilment*

Nurjahan's marriage with Jahangir led to a confluence of two distinct aesthetic currents. Jahangir adored and studied nature. Nurjahan admired and eulogised it. Jahangir was a litterateur par excellence and Nurjahan an impromptu composer. Jahangir was a liberal humanist and Nurjahan a reputed altruist. Jahangir loved beauty and Nurjahan was beauty incarnate. Jahangir was an adventurer and Nurjahan, a daring consort full of confidence. Jahangir was an apostle of justice and Nurjahan a replica of benevolence and generosity. The pious union of these two gifted personages proved consequential, not only upon administration and politics, but also upon the development of art, literature and architecture during Jahangir's reign.

Nurjahan's contribution in the field of literature was immense. Well versed in Arabic and Persian, she, a facile pen, composed superb poetry.<sup>1</sup> Whenever Jahangir uttered a line in verse, Nurjahan completed it in perfect communion of diction, rhyme, content and language.<sup>2</sup>

The literary flow and expressions of Nurjahan Begum were excellent.<sup>3</sup> She visualized natural phenomenon as a

sympathetic friend of mankind. Nothing escaped her sight. Even the smallest thing that attracted her attention and found aesthetic expression in her verse.<sup>4</sup> In poetic style, the words chosen by her fully conveyed her emotions. The moon and the starry sky found eloquent references in her verses.<sup>5</sup>

She used to recite lyrics in enchanting tunes. In her early life, her ghazals were popular in the royal palace. She sang on festive occasions in the royal harem. Her voice was very melodious. The Rajput queens of emperor Akbar used to admire her performance. Her talent of composing verses flourished unabated when she married Jahangir who was himself a diarist of high excellence and also a renowned poet.

In the company of Jahangir, Nurjahan Begum began composing sober and thoughtful poetry. Khafi Khan has compiled in his book some of Nurjahan's thought provoking verses. Dr. K.S. Lal has selected and translated some of these verses in English. The glimpse of Nurjahan's liberal and broad minded approach to life and its auguries are discernible in these verses.<sup>6</sup> In her verses Nurjahan expresses poignant feelings of love which sounds eternal. In one of her verses she tells the recluse not to create terror in her heart about the day of judgement. Her love-poetry is unique in the sense that its worldly sense gets totally lost in the urge for spiritual communion with the lord.<sup>7</sup>

A modern researcher mentions about Qazi Abdul's article in Massiri Patna (July 1962) for spurious and genuine verses of Nurjahan. She quotes some of Nurjahan's verses from Miftah-ut-Tawarikh and Ali Akbar Dahkhuda's Loghat Nama (1879-1956, Vol. 84, University de Tehran). She also refers to Kalimat-us-Shuara written by Muhammad Surkhush.<sup>8</sup> She refers to another book Atash Kada of Luff Ali Beg Azar in which verses of Nurjahan Begum appear.<sup>9</sup> But all these couplets mentioned by the author of 'Nurjahan and her family' mainly deal with themes of worldly love. Besides the authenticity of these verses and the author have not been properly

established. The references given by the learned author of the earlier mentioned monograph have not been properly ascertained in the historical perspective.

The works which she mentions are mainly literary works. No historical evidence is given to prove that Nurjahan the author of the collection contained in the works mentioned by her. However, the genius of Nurjahan as a poetess and as an impromptu composer have been historically assessed by Khafi Khan. Some verses which he has compiled, do belong to Nurjahan Begum and they are enough to prove that Nurjahan was a born poetess.

Nurjahan patronised eminent poets, scholars and writers of her time. She was extra generous towards the female poetesses of her time.<sup>10</sup> She took special care in providing financial assistance to literary men and women. Under her personal care and benign financial support, grand Mushairas were organised in the royal Courts at Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore, Ajmer and Mandu. Nurjahan highly valued the literary luminaries of her time and often invited them to participate in poetic competitions. The most celebrated poet to grace the royal 'mushairas' convened by Nurjahan Begum was Qasim Khan, another son-in-law of Mirza Ghiyas Beg. He possessed a poetic temperament and composed a Diwan which was widely applauded.<sup>11</sup>

Under Nurjahan's impact, Jahangir extended generous patronage to poets who migrated from Safawi Persia. This notable galaxy included eminent persons like Naziri, Talib Isfahani, Shaida, Saida-i-Gilani, Nishani and Munir Lahauri. Some others were Naqib Khan, Niyamat-Ullah and Abdul Haq Dehlvi. The Imperial Court was adorned by a galaxy of such poets as Hayati, Rasmi, Navi and Mulla Shakibi, Mahwai Hamadani. Urfi Shirazi and Mulla Abdul Baqi Nihawandi. To head them all was Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khana who produced in exquisite Persian version of the Memoirs of Babur under royal orders.<sup>12</sup> His remarkable library in Ahemdabad

embalmed the great ideals of the oriental world and the memory of a culture that had in its time profoundly influenced the world.

Nurjahan possessed a library of her own. She purchased many rare manuscripts and monographs for her personal library. She enriched her library by adding valuable books like *Diwan of Mirza Kamran*.<sup>13</sup> Continuing the earlier traditions, she patronised Sanskrit and Brij languages and literature. She was fond of visiting Mathura and Brindaban. She liked to listen to the devotional songs there. The Hindus attained high proficiency in Persian language and literature. A Brahmin, Jagannath, was raised to the status of the 'Court Pandit' during her period. He was granted the title of 'Panditraj'. Jagannath enjoyed the benevolent patronage of Nurjahan Begum and her brother Asaf Khan. But the Mughal Court of Nurjahan's time was the rendezvous of all that was the best in Persian literature. Poets, prose writers, painters, astronomers, physicians and artists, all of them enriched the storehouse of art and culture under the worthy guidance of Nurjahan Begum and her literary counterpart, Jahangir.

Like all the elite women of Mughal India, empress Nurjahan Begum built many gardens and sarais. She was a naturalist and was very fond of gardens. She designed and built many a pleasure resort throughout the empire. Shahdara at Lahore was built by her which contained a very beautiful garden. She also built a lofty house in the midst of the royal garden at Nur Sarai.<sup>14</sup> She built another Sarai in her name at Patna.

She usually spent the summer season in the beautiful Valley of Kashmir, 'the terrestrial paradise of India'. She built there the 'Nur Manzil' and the Nur Afshan gardens. The gardens were designed by her and in the natural sequel named after her. About eight kilometers away from Srinagar, Achhabal was a favourite picnic spot with springs and plants all around. She developed this place which abounded in the gifts

of nature. Peter Mundy observes, "the garden is very handsome, laid out in regular walks and full of fruit trees-apple, pear, plum, apricot and cherry. The waterfall produced the finest effect imaginable, specially at night, when innumerable lamps fixed in parts of the wall adapted for that purpose, are lighted under the sheet of water."<sup>15</sup>

Between the years 1612 and 1619, she designed and laid out a number of gardens about 18 kilometers beyond Achhabal. One of the ponds in such a garden contained fish so time that they appeared when called on the allurements of pieces of bread thrown into water. The gardens carry inscriptions of the celebrated Nurjahan Begum.<sup>16</sup> Nurjahan also built some gardens at Agra and according to a foreign traveller, one such garden existed on the other side of the river Yamuna and was known as Moti Ka Bagh. She possessed aesthetic sense in abundance and left imprints of her refined taste and desire of lasting fame in the main towns of the empire either in the form of gardens with pavilions and fountains or in the form of spacious plantations and splendid monuments.<sup>17</sup>

In the year 1623, she laid out the Bagh-i-Bahar the western bank of Dal lake at Sadur Khun.<sup>18</sup> The garden consisted of the terraces of which one approached the Dal lake and the other stood on a higher level. In between the terraces, there was a stone pavillion. This garden was watered by a canal dug from river Indus.

Nurjahan took keen interest in the development of art and architecture. Her aesthetic taste and refinement reflected in all what she designed and built under the spell of her sharp intellect and vision. Pelsaert comments that, "she erected very expensive buildings in all directions. Sarais or halting places such as no one has ever made before intending thereby to establish an enduring reputation."<sup>19</sup> In Tujuk-i-Jahangiri it is mentioned that she built the Nur Sarai.<sup>20</sup> A sarai was built at Sikandara by her orders which accommodated 500 horses and about 300 people.<sup>21</sup>



She constructed three sepulchral edifices. For her father's tomb she desired to build a mausoleum of pure silver but her well wishers advised her to use the durable marble.<sup>22</sup> The tomb of Etmad-ud-daulah bears in every part of it the imprint of the refined feminism of this remarkable queen. There is no other building like it in the entire range of Mughal architecture. With much of its ornamentation of inlay work of semi-precious stones or *pietra dura*, it conveys, the impression of a rich article of jewellery magnified into architecture.<sup>23</sup> The building was completed in 1628 at a enormous cost.<sup>24</sup> The building reflects the architectural taste of Nurjahan as well as the truth that not only sons but daughters too can immortalize the parents' name and fame. It is an exquisite piece of art. The tomb of Etmad-ud-Daulah marks the definite stage of transition from red stone to white marble. 'This small but elegant structure stands in a class by itself as it illustrates a fresh interpretation of the building art, an expression of the style in its most delicate and refined aspect disregarding the size but aiming at exquisite finish.'<sup>25</sup>

The mausoleum of Jahangir at Shahdara near Lahore is unlike the tomb of Etmad-ud-daulah at Agra. The reasons for the dissimilarity and contrast are two-fold. In the first place, it was not Nurjahan who planned and designed the mausoleum at Shahdara but Jahangir himself. Secondly Nurjahan had meagre resources of her own and she took up the project in her widowhood. The building is of red stone in-laid with marble. The tomb of Nurjahan is also built in Shahdara and is an humble structure planned and built by herself.

Nurjahan, as the worthy consort of Jahangir, shared actively her husband's interest in painting. She was adept in the art of painting and possessed an inner sense of colour adjustment. In one painting of Jahangir's time, Nurjahan in the royal durbar has been shown examining a portrait painted by some eminent painter.<sup>26</sup>

Nurjahan's inner urge for creativity found fulfilment not only in literature and architecture but in various arts and handicrafts that speak of her dexterity. She had a keen sense of colour combination and symmetry in designs. She was a master mind in innovating fashions and style. She, through her genius, became the very life and soul of the entire textile industry of her time.<sup>27</sup> She designed many new dresses and the most famous of them were 'Dodami Muslin' for dress, panchtoliya for veils, Badla (silver thread) and Kinara (silver thread lace). She invented the Farsh-i-chandani (silvery carpets) in different colours and designs. The 'Peshwas' and 'Panchtoliya orhni' designed by Nurjahan had a high price of forty rupees each. Many new varieties of brocade, lace, gowns and carpets were designed by Nurjahan.<sup>28</sup> The 'Nur Mahali' was her gift to brides of poor families. It was an inexpensive dress to be worn at the pious ceremony of marriage by the bride and the bride-groom. An elegant item of female dress known as Jammu became popular which consisted of a tightly fit 'kurti' upto the knee and tight sleeves fastened upto the breast, decorated with frills in front and worn with Angiya. Tight fitted trousers were worn with it. Dupattas of light thin cloth were worn with this dress.<sup>29</sup>

Not only did she design new dresses but also innovated many ornaments of gold and silver. She laid down new patterns and elegants design for many gold ornaments.<sup>30</sup> Under her guidance the form and style of ornaments developed. Nurjahan took keen interest in the decoration of the inner apartments. With exquisits taste, vision, colour and care, she enhanced the magnificance of the emperor's court. The expenditure was considerably curtailed by her superb art of household management. She made great improvement in the quality of furniture used in the royal apartments, introduced new royal fasions and ettiquetts which looked more dignified and colourful than those used before. She decorated the apartments with curtains, Jhilmils, chilmans and chicks. These partitions and curtains where royal ladies 'glittered with diamonds,' provided them opportunity to know about the

outer world.<sup>31</sup> Everywhere there was profusion of gold, silver and precious stones on pillars and the ceilings. Nurjahan decorated the spacious courtyards with marble, mosaic paintings and other inlaid decoration. She got them enclosed by gardens with water courses and fountains all round.<sup>32</sup>

The creativity of Nurjahan remarkably manifested in the invention of many scents. Her mother Asmat Begum invented the 'Itra Gulab' about which Jahangir records that, "this Itr is a discovery which was made during my reign through the efforts of the mother of Nurjahan Begum. When she was making rose-water a scum formed on the surface of the dishes into which the hot rose-water was poured from the jugs. She collected this scum little by little; when much rose water was obtained a sensible portion of the scum was collected. It is of such strength in perfume that if one drop be rubbed on the palm of the hand it scents a whole assembly, and it appears as if many red rosebuds had bloomed at once. There is no other scent of equal excellence to it. It restores hearts that have gone and brings back withered souls. In reward for that invention I presented a string of pearls to the inventress. Salima Sultan Begum was present and she gave this oil the name of 'itr-i-Jahangiri'".<sup>33</sup>

Nurjahan decorated her own apartments with taste. The niches were shaped in attractive designs adorned with porcelain vases with flower pots in them. Her mother Asmat Begum looked after the arrangements of the harem herself to the liking of Nurjahan Begum.

The refinement of Nurjahan Begum was easily discernible during the royal feasts. On many occasions, she took delight in arranging feasts and banquets and made splendid arrangements. Jahangir admired her ability to execute the feasts flawlessly. On such occasions, her masterly decorations added grace and glamour to these functions. She invited emperor Jahangir for a royal feast in 1617 in a house situated in the midst of a large tank.<sup>34</sup> Lamps were lighted all round. All the Amirs who assembled had drinks and rich food. The

feast passed off not only flawlessly but also in a glamorous and colourful style.<sup>35</sup> She organized another feast to celebrate Khurram's victory over Mewar.<sup>36</sup> When Nurjahan's house, the 'Nur Sarai', was completed in 1620 and with a beautiful garden all round, she organized a grand feast in honour of Jahangir and presented to him rare gifts.<sup>37</sup> In 1621 Nurjahan organized a special feast to celebrate the achievements of her husband in Nur Afshan garden. With all care and attention, she supervised the royal entertainment.<sup>38</sup>

When Jahangir recovered from illness she organized an attractive feast the same year on the occasion of the lunar weighing ceremony of her husband. She ordered her vakils to make fine arrangements.<sup>39</sup> She herself supervised the arrangements and offered valuable gifts to the emperor.<sup>40</sup>

She patronised classical music and dance but was against the prevalent cheap quality of royal entertainment in the harem. She tried to stop them and start healthy and classical music conferences of expert musicians. She composed songs and herself sang in a melodious style.<sup>41</sup> Paintings of ladies holding various musical instruments bear out the popularity of music among women. Nurjahan patronized music by women on festivals like Nauroz Mahfil.<sup>42</sup>

Nurjahan's philanthropy was supreme. She protected people from tyranny and oppression. Her charity has been admired even by her bitter critics.<sup>43</sup> One of them writes, "If ever she learnt that any orphan girl was destitute and friendless, she would bring about her marriage and give her a wedding portion."<sup>44</sup> Another chronicler mentions, 'Nurjahan won golden appreciation from the people. She was liberal and just to all who begged her support. She was an assylum for the sufferers and helpless girls wese married at the expense of her private purse.'<sup>45</sup> She distributed alms regularly and was a true muslim.<sup>46</sup>

Nurjahan enjoyed the adventurous entertainment of hunting. She was the only lady to have this hobby. In 1616

she shot a bird named 'Qrisha', the like of which for size and beauty of colour had never been seen.<sup>47</sup> In 1617 in an hunting expedition she killed four tigers.<sup>48</sup> Jahangir was so happy with her that he presented a pair of bracelets and distributed one thousand 'Asharfis' (gold coins).<sup>49</sup> She killed a tiger with one shot when on another occasion she accompanied Jahangir in a hunting expedition.<sup>50</sup>

Nurjahan Begum, who had built her own palaces outside the fort not only in Agra but also in Lahore and Kashmir, adorned the royal city of Agra which she loved most. Jahangir advised his nobles to build stately mansions in the city. The European travellers record that 'the city of Agra and suburbs are one way seven miles in length and three in breadth..... the city lies in the manner of half a moon, bellying landward. On the banks of Jamuna there are many goodly houses of the nobility pleasantly overlooking the river.'<sup>51</sup> Another eye witness affirms, "every one has tried to be close to the river bank and consequently the water front is occupied by the costly palaces of all the famous lords, which make it appear very gay and magnificent."<sup>52</sup> It is significant to note that Nurjahan's Agra presented the spectacle of a royal park rather than a city due to the luxurient groves all around it. Many persons erected buildings of three or four storeys in Agra outside the fort. Asaf Khan, the brother of Nurjahan Begum, built exceedingly handsome and costly palaces at Agra.<sup>53</sup> Curiously enough, the engineers of the time planned stately mansions with full provisions of fresh water in plenty and protection against heat. There were arrangements of gardens and tanks inside the houses. The water was drawn either by oxen or raised by a wheel in such quantity that it flew through a laden pipe and rose like a fountain.

Nurjahan Begum, nobly born to govern and command', blossomed to be a perfect woman. The love of her husband was the most precious possession of her life. Jahangir praised and trusted her. She never allowed Jahangir to dine outside.<sup>54</sup> He did not eat even at the mansion of

Nurjahan's father.<sup>55</sup> She always moved with Jahangir like a shadow. Whenever Jahangir went to Kashmir to enjoy cool air of the hills or went to Ajmer or to Mandu or to other places, she accompanied him. She went with him on hunting expeditions. In the royal camps, Nurjahan instilled zest and creativity. When she was with Jahangir at Mandu, she looked after Jahangir's health as intently as she supervised the lay out of the royal court—"the most spacious house, there with excellent vault and arches."<sup>56</sup> The foreign travellers watched the immense and incredible riches with amazement in gold pearls, precious stones, jewels and many other glittering vanities.<sup>57</sup>

Though she possessed enormous wealth in forms of cash, jewellery, precious stones, Jagirs, Mansabs and collection, she did not possess lust of money. She also maintained a fleet of ships, and carried on her own trade in Indigo and embroidered cloth.<sup>58</sup> Her officers collected duties in all parts of the countries.<sup>59</sup> She exchanged gifts and presents with the English who came to India. Thomas Roe offered various presents to her including an English coach, mirror chest and British toys. She got it decorated with gold and velvet according to her taste.<sup>60</sup> Nurjahan was economical and did not believe in uselessly wasting do money. She made proper use of her resources in constructing beautiful edifices, laying out gardens, patronizing art and literature and indulging in creative activity.<sup>61</sup> She loved to distribute alms to the poor and needy.<sup>62</sup>

The mother of Inam Quli Khan, the ruler of Turan, sent a letter of goodwill to Nurjahan along with some rare gifts from her country. Empress Nurjahan Begum reciprocated the gesture by sending a return embassy under Khwaja Nasir to Samarqand and sent with him the choicest gifts from India for the mother of the Turani king.<sup>63</sup> Nurjahan exchanged letters and gifts with royal women of other countries and contributed to the development of goodwill and

mutual understanding between India and the countries of West Asia.

A talented, cultured, polished life partner of Emperor Jahangir, Nurjahan attained the choicest fulfilment of her life and shared with him love of arts and ornamentation. A painter, a poet and an innovator in dress design, she was an excellent shot and an accomplished horse rider. Her perfection manifested in the combination of such traits as were contradictory and rare. Her wisdom and dexterity, humanism and altruism, will and determination brought to her a rare contentment and immense success which strangely made her to realize the auguries and miseries of the world and its transitory nature. Yet she could select the lively and the beautiful out of it to fulfil her life's mission and be happy in the memory of the Lord.

Nurjahan's greatest fulfilment was the immense love that she received from Jahangir through her sincerity in her conjugal relationship. She possessed immense love for Jahangir. Though she knew many of his pitfalls, she continued loving and adoring him with amazing poise, composure and equanimity.

She won full confidence of her husband—a rare female distinction in the medieval age. It appears that the conjugal love between the two rested upon the inner realization of self and was not based upon relations of 'blood and flesh'. The attraction remained the same when Jahangir's health showed signs of decay and deterioration. He solely depended upon his sincere and devoted spouse. She steadily induced her husband to shun ferocity and callousness and adopt benevolence and humanism in his conduct as Emperor. Jahangir's love for Nurjahan gathered new dimensions each time she displayed large heartedness, sense of justice and fair play. He was not shy of accepting that 'the Malika rules me because of her boundless munificence'. No virtue appealed more to a man like Jahangir than the generosity and large heartedness of Nurjahan.

As a women, her life's mission was fulfilled, yet she was forced by circumstances to plunge into politics and display the worth of her rare wisdom and discretion.

## References

1. Law, N N., "Promotion of Learning in Medieval India", p. 202.
2. Khafii Khan has compiled a few of her verses which reflect her emotional temperament, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 270-71.
3. Nurjahan's verses are lost into oblivion leaving a few which Khafii Khan compiled in his work.
4. One day the king was wearing an apparel in which ruby was hanging in the strap. On seeing it Nurjahan in good mood composed the following verses and won the heart of Jahangir. The verse is given below :  

The red rubies that are sewn (like buttons) on the silken robe  
 Are in truth drops of my blood which hold thy garment at the collar.

K.S. Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 76
5. Once, in the month of Ramzan, seeing the new moon Jahangir recited a few lines and Nurjahan immediately completed it.....
6. "I do not bestow my heart (just) at appearances until I come to know of the real character ;  
 I know the reality about the seventy-two sects of people (i.e. all the people)".
7. "Oh Recluse! do not create terror in my ears about the Day of Judgement. I am aware of the extreme suffering which results from separation from the beloved."
8. It is edited by Muhammad Hussain Mahawi, Lucknow, 1951.
9. It is published by Qazi Fateh Muhammad Saleh and Muhammad Abdul Karim brother—Chandra Pant, Nurjahan and her Family, Allahabad, 1979, p. 205.
10. Mehr Harwi, one of her ladies in waiting was a poetess.  

K.S. Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 76
11. Loghat Nama, p. 55.
12. Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khana survived Akbar and also enjoyed Jahangir's favours.
13. The book is preserved in Khuda Baksh Library, Patna. On the first page it is written, "Three Muhar, The price of this treasure, Nawab Meherunnisa Begum."



14. Stuart, Gardens of the Great Mughals, p. 126.
15. Peter Mundy, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 159.
16. Bernier, *op. cit.*, p. 413.
17. Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
18. Qazwini, Badshah Nama (Transcript), Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University. Habib Collection Mss No. 32/22., p. 278. The Site is new under the Government of Kashmir.
19. Pelsaert, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
20. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, Vol. II. p. 78.
21. Thevenot, p. 34 (Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri) ed. S.N. Sen New Delhi, 1949.
22. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 277.
23. Fergusson, History of Eastern and Indian Architecture, Vol. II, pp. 306-07.
24. It still stands by the side of Yamuna at Agra and attracts the tourists.
25. Percy Brown, Indian Architecture, p. 109.  
The details of the architectural aspect of this building have been dealt separately.
26. Stchonkine, plate VII.
27. K.S. Lal, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
28. *Ibid*, p. 76.
29. Pietra Della Valle, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 44.
30. T.H. Hendlay : Indian Jewellary, Vol. I. London, 1909, p. 10.
31. Ansari, European Travellers under the Mughals, pp. 12, 60.
32. Paintings from Mughal India (Plate No. 31).
33. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-71.
34. *Ibid*, Vol. I, pp. 385-86.
35. *Ibid*.
36. *Ibid*, p. 397.
37. *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 192.
38. *Ibid*, pp. 199-200.
39. *Ibid*, pp. 214-215.
40. *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 359.
41. Rekha Misra, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
42. Percy Brown—Indian Paintings under the Mughals, Plates X/VII and XXXI.
43. Mutamid Khan, *op. cit.*, (E.&D.) Vol. VI, p. 405.
44. *Ibid*.

45. Mohammed Hadi, *op. cit.*, p. 399 (E.&D. Vol. VI).
46. *Ibid.*
47. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, (R&B) Vol. I. p. 348.
48. Iqbal Nama, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.
49. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 73-74.
50. Khafi Khan, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 289.
51. Manucci, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 350-51.
52. Palsaert (E&D) Vol. VI, App. pp. 496-97.
53. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 16.
54. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 318-19.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 351.
56. Early Travels, p. 310.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
58. Records of English Factories in India, (1618-21), p. 81.
59. Palsaert, *op. cit.* p. 4.
60. Embassy, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 324, 384-86, 427-458.
61. Iqbal Nama (E&D) Vol. VI, p. 405.
62. Massir—Vol. II, p. 1078.
63. *Ibid.*

## *Welter of Politics*

Justice is denied to a woman of rare distinction—the Empress Nurjahan Begum, when it is said that she possessed a man's brain and ambition.<sup>1</sup> Are efficiency and excellence the monopolies of men alone? Women too possess critical acumen, sharp intellect and qualities of leadership. When equal opportunities are denied to them these traits do not fully develop into intellect and wisdom. If a woman is judged by her wisdom and discretion, Nurjahan did possess better brain than any other man of her time. She felt no difficulty in solving the intricate problems of the day. She was dexterous in the art of administration and the technique of state craft. She possessed courage and valour in abundance. She never lost her mental balance and equanimity of temper. She was unique in the sense that greater the danger she faced in life, greater were her fortitude and resourcefulness to combat those dangers. All these traits of her character led her quietly towards phenomenal success inspite of her few weaknesses.

As Padshah Begum, she was the head of the female elites of the Capital and the mistress of the imperial household. Jahangir was accustomed to ease and complacency

owing to his growing age and indifferent health.<sup>2</sup> He delegated all authority to the queen empress whom he found not only intelligent but also hardworking. Besides, she loved him intensely and he was fully confident of her supreme love. He did not give her the right of sovereignty in any emotional frenzy but after careful thought and consideration. He was convinced that Nurjahan was not just one among the three hundred women that he had in the harem. She was an extraordinary person in demeanour, stature and intellect. It was not her physical charm that allured him but her deep insight and practical wisdom that won his admiration for ever and ever.

When authority was delegated to Nurjahan, she used it with propriety, precision and discretion, conducting the affairs of the state judiciously with dignity and honour. She sat in the balcony of her palace and the nobles presented themselves to her to receive the royal Firmans. Jahangir issued orders that her name be put on the royal seal. Alleging her to be power monger, A.L. Srivastava writes, "She was so fond of power that she not only participated in the administration but attempted to concentrate authority in her hands."<sup>3</sup> Such charges are unfounded, biased and subjective. Historians in India, so far have failed to make a correct assessment of Nurjahan Begum's rare talents and political wisdom and have underestimated the positive role she played in polity, administration and military strategy. This is also true of the contemporary chroniclers who in order to please Shahjahan changed their style of writing after the death of Jahangir. The role of Nurjahan in politics, therefore needs a thorough examination based upon scientific and unbiased investigation.

At the time of her marriage, as already stated, Nurjahan was thirty four years of age and Jahangir was forty two. Both were quite mature and experienced persons. In 1622 she won 'the most enviable but well-deserved title of 'Padshah Begum'.<sup>4</sup> It was indeed her first political achievement worthy of being noted in history. Contemporary chroniclers including the Emperor himself do not accuse her of any nefarious

motives in contemporary politics. Those who wrote during Shahjahan's reign and after, charged Nurjahan with lust of power. All foreign travellers who visited India from 1605 to 1627 and a few even afterwards refer to the existence of a clique or Junta formed by Nurjahan who led herself in the Welter of Politics for personal ambitions. They depended upon either the 'whispers' ventilated from the four walls of the nobles's mansions or the cheap bazaar gossips and based their accounts on superficial foundation far from reality.

With her ascendancy as empress, her father Etmad-ud-daula was elevated to the post of Prime Minister. Her mother Asmat Begum was appointed as the Chief of the Royal Harem.<sup>5</sup> She also acted as the guide and counsellor of her daughter. Asaf Khan, her brother, was appointed the Master of household and his daughter Arjumand Banu (later known as Mumtaz Mahal) was married to Prince Khurram on whom Jahangir bestowed the title of Shahjahan in 1617.<sup>6</sup> All these able, efficient and wise individuals combined together to provide not only a compact, efficient and coherent administrative unit but also let peace and plenty prevail in the Empire. None of these men and women holding high offices of responsibility in the Mughal State under Jahangir and many other relatives of Nurjahan who occupied important posts in different provinces could be labelled as 'worthless and incapable'. Besides, it was no innovation over the familiar pattern of the Mughal statecraft. Neither the so called group which so ably helped Jahangir in administration enjoined upon Nurjahan any leadership nor Nurjahan imposed herself as the leader or the chief of the group. Even if it were any 'Junta' as alleged by the critics, it was a band of dedicated and devoted aristocrats for whom the unity and integrity of the Mughal State reigned supreme. They lived, worked and died for the sublime cause. If Nurjahan exerted any influence in politics, it was the use of her moral force to inspire her husband to rule with prudence, excellence and elegance. Her only desire was that her husband administered the state with proficiency. She was invariably forced to intervene in the affairs of the state when the nobles intrigued and the princes exhibited extra ambitious designs.

When a grave situation arose, Nurjahan with her dash and vision, knew well to deal with it either by diplomacy or by army intervention. Her role in politics with the back drop of treason, rebellion and conspiracy should be viewed in the right perspective to assess her legitimate place in history.

According to a foreign traveller, 'Nurjahan commands and governs the king's harem with supreme authority, having cunningly removed out of Harem, either by marriage or other handsome ways, all the other women who might give her any jealousy and having also in the court made many alterations by advancing her own creatures'.<sup>7</sup> Whatever authority Nurjahan wielded during her husband's rule, was directed more towards security, integrity and solidarity of her husband's empire than her own ambitions and gains. The major factor that brought Nurjahan into active politics was the continuing deterioration in her husband's health. Jahangir relied upon his wife, Nurjahan, and he admits this fact in his autobiography also. The emergence of a group of loyal and faithful nobles around the royal couple to give counsel was also a matter of political exigency rather than political manouvering.

Empress Nurjahan appeared in Jharokha-i-darshan with Emperor Jahangir and firmly transacted the business of the state with steadfastness and courage. She tactfully dealt with the numerous problems and also sought the help of trusted nobles to run the government efficiently. She consulted her respected father Mirza Ghiyas Beg in state matters. The able Persian had grown grey in royal service and was a highly experienced politician and administrator and it was no manoeuvring or manipulation on part of Nurjahan that raised his status and position in the royal court. He was an able and experienced officer upon whom Emperor Akbar had also relied, valued his services and elevated him to the rank of the Chief Treasurer and Master of works of the Mughal State. His title Itimad-ud-daula meant order, precision and hard work.<sup>8</sup> With the efforts of her father, Nurjahan succeeded in

controlling the expenditure of the State and enhancing the revenue.

Her mother Asmat Begum was a refined Persian woman. She was an educated and intelligent lady who invented the scent of roses which was also called *Itr-i-Jahangiri*.<sup>9</sup> She exercised healthy influence upon Nurjahan and advised her to be friendly and generous towards every member of the royal family. In critical and adverse circumstances, she always gave sane advice to her daughter. On political and commercial issues, she advised Nurjahan to be prudent and wise. She ever served as a balancing force in the complex feudal rivalry among the Emperor's relatives.

Asaf Khan was an efficient and able commander. He was, no doubt, Nurjahan's brother but more than that he was an renowned economist of his time. He embarked upon a brilliant official career as Master of the Household. He greatly improved the financial position of the State by personally working hard to examine the accounts of his sub-ordinate and to supervise the details of administration. A highly educated person as he was, his versatile talents found full recognition in the royal court.<sup>10</sup> His rise therefore was on his own merit and wisdom, and Nurjahan had hardly an effective intervention to make in this matter. Asaf Khan always displayed the highest capacity for mastering facts and devising experiments.<sup>11</sup> Nurjahan valued him for his genius in statecraft. He was earlier known by the name *Itiqad Khan*<sup>12</sup> but later on, he was more popularly known as *Asaf Khan*.<sup>13</sup> Jahangir refers in his autobiography about the talents and ability of Asaf Khan.

To assert that empress Nurjahan grabbed political power and appointed her favourites on important posts, is a theory that needs to be revised upon hard facts. If Nurjahan appointed Dila Rani in place of Haji Koka as the Superintendent of Palace, it was because on such post trusted females were most suitable and not on account of any political manouvering or play of moods. A contemporary Persian chronicler complains

that without the seal of Nurjahan, the Sadr-us-Sadur would not pay the stipends and the servants and eunuchs of her father Itimad-ud-daula occupied positions of political eminence.<sup>14</sup> But all these observations are ill founded and recorded later during Shahjahan's ascendancy and thus can not be fully relied upon. It is therefore totally wrong to assume that Nurjahan manipulated to raise the political status of her kinsmen.

With the advent of Nurjahan into politics, the Emperor gradually reduced his alcoholic quota and more and more depended on her. She fully won the confidence of her husband and earned the faith of the people over whom she ruled with a spirit of justice and charity.

However, Jahangir's health kept on deteriorating due to addiction beyond limit in his early years and indiscriminate pursuit of pleasures. Nurjahan began sitting with him at the daily public appearance with her hand on his back gracefully lending him the right support that Jahangir needed then.

After Jahangir grew firm in his conviction that his wife selflessly loved him, he ordered that drums and orchestras earmarked for Nurjahan should be played after those of the King.<sup>15</sup> She received salutations and issued orders. Not all but some of the coins were struck in her name and the imperial Firmans bore her seal and signature.<sup>16</sup> In the words of a historian, 'never before in Indian history any spouse of the king attained such an absolute authority as Nurjahan. She converted the harem into a court where the mysteries of State policy were discussed with a freedom and a power seldom known under despotic government.'<sup>17</sup>

From the harem, the celebrated decrees of Jahangir were issued. An atmosphere of communal harmony prevailed in the reign of Jahangir and the people were happy and secure. The efforts of Nuujahan Begum rendered the reign of Jahangir as one of the most prosperous and peaceful in Mughal Age. She devoted time to study the intricate problems and suggested



means and ways to solve them. Her role as a woman statesman had been unprecedented in the annals of Medieval India. Besides, there was hardly any example of the fair sex attaining an ascendancy so paramount and political control so perfect over the destinies of so many subject principalities as the renowned Nurjahan.<sup>18</sup>

In a modern work, Nurjahan has been noted as "a courageous lady endowed with the capacity of understanding the political problems and of taking active interest in matters of administration."<sup>19</sup> She is further mentioned as a sound adviser to her husband.<sup>20</sup> The emperor reposed confidence in her after judging her fully well. When she proved her worth, she began to exercise great political influence.

Her critics assert that her undue influence over Jahangir brought ruin to the empire. She alienated Khurram who, after gaining the title of Shahjahan, had come into prominence.<sup>21</sup> The clash of interest with Shahjahan, prompted her to plan his removal from Agra. She wanted to send him to a distant place like Qandhar to deprive him of his Jagir. When he declined to obey the royal command and stood in open rebellion, Nurjahan took immediate action in curbing the rebellion and made him to realize the consequences of his misdeeds. As a matter of fact, Shahjahan's personal ambition after his success in Mewar, Malwa and Deccan immensely grew and he nourished the dream of attaining Kingship and for obvious reasons Nurjahan could not have tolerated it. A blame is put on Nurjahan that her growing influence in politics ultimately accelerated the resentment among the important nobles of the state and she was responsible for the rebellion of Mahabat Khan, which totally upset the political equilibrium.

Wali Sirhindi, one of the contemporary Persian chronicler, who wrote *Tawarikh-i-Jahangir Shahi* in the fourteenth year of Jahangir's reign, does not refer to any such destructive influence of Nurjahan Begum. The author of *Fath Nama-i-Nurjahan Begum*, Kami Shirazi, who wrote in about 1626, does not mention any clique or Nurjahan Junta. Jahangir's

Memoirs do not indicate any event of Nurjahan's undue interference in political matters. Motamid Khan's *Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangir* and Kamgar Hussain's *Maasir-i-Jahangiri* do mention of the existence of a definite political group led by Nurjahan that comprised of her relatives who were raised to high position and eminence by Nurjahan.

It would not be unfair to examine the views of some modern historians who have attempted to visualize the political scene during Emperor Jahangir's time. It is held by a modern historian that, 'it would be unfair to attribute purely political ambition to her acts of interference or her active participation in political matters.'<sup>22</sup> Another modern historian concludes that, whatever influence Nurjahan exercised over Jahangir was of a purely personal nature based possibly on her emotions and her devotion to him.<sup>23</sup>

To change Nurjahan, therefore, of having a compulsive lust for power in the sixteen years of her hegemony and say that she used every vile known to man or woman to remain entrenched at the pinnacle is totally baseless and unfounded. What actually happened was also not new to medieval polity anywhere in the world. The female domination was unbearable to the elites and the nobility, who actually controlled the reins of administration and acted a pillars of the State.

The confusions have been worse confounded by propounding strange theories regarding Nurjahan's role in politics. Her political role has been usually divided by the historians into two periods. From 1611 to 1622, they assert that her influence over Jahangir and participation in politics was healthy and useful and bore benign results. From 1622 to 1627, according to them, she did not act wisely and upset the whole political structure and framework by her obstinacy.

Many historians evaluate Nurjahan, not by her acts but, by the results of her acts and have distorted her fair image to say that the policy she adopted towards Shahjahan and Mahabat Khan led to a gradual deterioration in administration and

made them to rebel against Jahangir, weakening the foundation of the Mughal Rule.

In the medieval polity, a woman's ascendancy to power could never be palatable to the orthodox nobility and the ulemas. They were helpless in tolerating it for some years but were waiting for an opportunity to give vent to jealousy and ill will, that they were harbouring towards the celebrated Nurjahan. So long Mirza Ghiyas Beg was alive, he kept a check and maintained a balance. He was a far sighted administrator, who tried to satisfy those who mattered in the Court. He consummated matrimonial alliances in the families of many influential nobles. He befriended them all and exchanged gifts and presents with them. When his daughter reached the coveted post of Padshah Begum, he became liberal and large hearted to grant favours to the nobles and other aristocrats. Asmat Begum's role to bind the nobility together and infuse love and humanism in the emperor's family was exemplary. But after their death, no sensible person remained, who could claim proximity with Nurjahan to instill in her mind the benefit of a timely move and political action.

To properly understand the role of Nurjahan Begum, it is necessary to view her political participation as a whole and not in two separate sections or specific time period.

Nurjahan did not have to face many problems in the beginning. She evoked curiosity and interest among the nobles for her talents, confidence and demeanour as they heard about her simple and austere life in the precincts of the Harem. All, including the male members of the royal linkages, held her in high esteem.

She mainly concentrated upon Jahangir's well being and made him reduce the cup of wine, he usually took without restraint. She pursued it as her first responsibility as Malika and sincerely looked after her husband's health. Yet she did not remain indifferent to the political events that had a direct and significant impact upon the solidarity of the empire. She

initiated a people-oriented administration, directing her energies towards the betterment of people's lot and towards maintenance of peace and plenty in the empire. Her daily public appearance in Jharokha Darshan was not just a show of her exuberance but an opportunity to know more about the people and remove their maladies as far as possible.

When the strong army sent to South under Prince Parwez, Raja Man Singh and Khan-i-Jahan met with a rebuff, Nurjahan was upset as it was the first field engagement of the imperial forces after her marriage. Keeping her anguish to herself, she put forth a revised plan of action to retrieve the situation.<sup>24</sup> She was resolute in her demand that Parwez be replaced by Prince Khurram and also that Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana be restored to favour and be given supreme command of operations in the Deccan. Her move was supported by many senior Umras. Khurram had already distinguished himself by forcing Rana Amar Singh to surrender in Mewar. Jahangir agreed to her proposal and victory after victory were attained.

Nurjahan's political worth was realized by the members of the royal family as well as the nobles, when through her efforts, she brought about many a reconciliation between Jahangir and his sons and also among other members of the royal family. She was also instrumental in bringing about the reconciliation of Khurram and his father.<sup>25</sup>

The performances of Mughal expeditions in Rajputana, so far, were far from satisfactory ever since Jahangir assumed the reign. Prince Parwez and Jaffar Beg were the Commanders of the Mughal army which was sent to Rajputana in 1606. But the siege had to be discontinued because of the unhappy outbreak of Khusrav's revolt.<sup>26</sup> The second expedition to Rajputana was sent in 1608 under Mahatab Khan's command. But no effective headway could be made and Mahabat Khan was replaced by Ab-dulla-Khan. He was also recalled on account of the exigencies of Deccan campaign.

In the year 1613, Jahangir decided to continue the seige against Rajputana under the joint command of Aziz Koka and Prince Kurram.<sup>27</sup> Nurjahan exerted her influence and advised Jahangir to leave the absolute command of the expedition against the Rajputs to Khurram who rightly conducted the campaign with consummate skill and master strategy. He reduced Rana Amar Singh to great straits by devastating his country and cutting the supplier of the enemy. Jahangir describes the defeat of the Raja and tells about the message of Rana through Shubhakaran and Hardas Jhala.<sup>28</sup> On the mature advice that empress Nurjahan Begum gave, Jahangir graciously accepted the Rana's Submission and terms of the treaty. The prestige of the Mughal empire was tremendously enhanced on account of statesman like disposition of Nurjahan who deliberated upon this strategic issue with sagacity and prudence par excellence.

Towards the close of 1616, Khurram's camp equipage started from Ajmer for Deccan. He received the title of 'Shah' which no Timuride Prince had ever received.<sup>29</sup> Nurjahan and Jahangir, who were at Ajmer proceeded to Mandu to provide moral support to Shahjahan. Both the Emperor and the Empress were deeply concerned about the victory of Prince Khurram in the prestigious Deccan campaign which had by now assumed greater dimensions than ever before in Mughal policy towards the annexation of the entire Deccan peninsula. The rumours of the glamour of the Mughal camp as well as the news of their physical might totally upset Malik Amber and peace was concluded after restoration of Balaghat territory, surrender of Ahmadnagar Fort and other strong holds and the payment of tribute by the Deccan Chiefs.<sup>30</sup>

Khurram came back to Mandu after his victory in the Deccan with treasures and offerings. Nurjahan welcomed the brave son with love and affection and he was raised to the rank of 30,000 Zat and Sawar. She advised Jahangir to appoint Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana as the Governor of Berar, Khandesh and Ahmadnagar and issue orders for the defence and administration of these provinces. However, the victory was

short lived and Malik Amber once again gained what he had substantially lost. On hearing the news of Mughal repulses in the South, Jahangir was disheartened. Nurjahan rose to the occasion and boosted his morale and with her ready wit and chivalrous bearing came out with an honourable solution to diffuse the crisis and Malik Amber was forced to pay a sum of 50 lacs to the Imperial Treasury.<sup>31</sup>

In 1623 both Bijapur and Ahmadnagar were involved in a political wrangle and sought Mughal help. Mahabat Khan lent support to the ruler of Bijapur, who was weaker than the Ahmadnagar incumbent but in 1629 Malik Amber died and Ahmadnagar found itself too weak to struggle with Bijapur which was getting all help from the Mughals.<sup>32</sup> It was time for the Mughals to launch major diplomatic cum military manouvers. Peace could be restored in the Deccan in a manner that established Mughal hegemony in Deccan. When the question of appointment of an efficient Subedar came up, Nurjahan intervened and got Shahjahan appointed on this coveted post and thus by her superior diplomacy could attain the two fold objectives. She could provide Deccan with an able & efficient Governor and keep the ambitious Khurram away from the seat of power.

The mighty army of Jahangir, then invaded the Fort of Kangra, a Fort considered to be impregnable. Khurram and Raja Bikram together conquered it and obtained all treasures amassed by the Kings of Kangra. Jahangir and Nurjahan felt very happy over the victory and distributed aims from the 'spoils' of Kangra to the needy and the poor.<sup>33</sup>

The Mughal Court received ambassadors from the Persian King Shah Abbas in 1611, 1615, 1616 and 1620. They brought lavish presents for Nurjahan and Jahangir. But all these diplomatic courtesies were an eye wash. The Shah was gaining time to do mischief on the frontier and wanted to annex the strategic Kandahar which he did in 1622. Jahangir decided to launch a major offensive in order to recapture Kandahar. But the rebellion of Shahjahan foiled the Imperial

intentions as Jahangir got occupied with the interior danger threatening internal security. Throughout the rebellion of the Prince, Nurjahan showing all her prowess, followed a firm and resolute policy to undo all what Shahjahan wanted to do. Whereas Orissa fell in 1611 the Mughal army conquered Bengal in 1612. The Khokhars of Bihar were subdued in 1615. Khurda was finally annexed in the Mughal empire in 1617. Kishtwar, to the South of Kashmir, was conquered in 1620. It was famous for its fruit orchards and Saffron fields. In all these military campaigns which Jahangir initiated, Nurjahan always remained the nucleus of plan and action and played the decisive role. Khurram extended his whole hearted support till such time as he thought that his claim to the throne in future would never be thwarted by Nurjahan. However, suspicion gradually grew in his mind that his claim to the throne might be challenged by his brother Shaharyar to whom Nurjahan gave her daughter in marriage.

Nurjahan betrothed her daughter to Shaharyar in December, 1620. The marriage of Ladli Begum and Shaharyar was solemnized at Agra in April, 1621. Shaharayar, on her commendation was raised to the rank of 8,000 Zat and 4,000 Sawar. On the promotion of Nurjahan's son-in-law, Khurram was disillusioned and in desperation fell out of Nurjahan's authoritative orbit and started suspecting whatever Nurjahan intended, planned or acted. He believed that Shaharyar was being pushed as a claimant to the throne and his legitimate claim was being pushed aside. And inspite of all love and regard that he had for Nurjahan and her wisdom, his ambition to become the Emperor reigned supreme in his heart. In desperation, finding no other effective way to demonstrate his remonstrances, he had no option left other than to rebel against the Central Authority.

Khurram's fear and apprehension increased when the conservative nobles felt restless on account of Nurjahan's astounding success in solving the intricate political problems with ease and confidence inspite of her pre-occupation with

Jahangir who was critically ill. Emboldened by his military success, Shahjahan began to nourish ambitions to become the emperor forthwith. The first prey of his fury war helpless Khusrav under captivity, who was killed at his instance. His body was buried at Burhanpur in May 1622.<sup>35</sup> Jahangir mourned deeply the death of Prince Khusrav but knowingly he did not punish the culprits.

Jahangir's health was failing every day. His repeated visits to Kashmir and other health resorts did not yield the desired results. The treatment of eminent physicians and Nurjahan's affectionate care could be of no avail and it had become crystal clear that Jahangir's days were numbered and the effective power had to pass on to some other hands.<sup>35</sup> But as to who was to capture power was the question. It was also certain that two master minds could never reconcile. It was to be seen whether the budding cub had to succumb to the lioness or the lioness would be devoured by the cub.

Empress Nurjahan and Prince Shahjahan both were conscious of the possible political developments and the dire consequences. The time had evidently come for the penultimate transition and Shahjahan was too impatient to call it a day. He clearly saw that his chance lay in vigorous action lest Nurjahan should put forward the claim of the docile Shaharyar and completely jeopardize his rightful entry.<sup>36</sup>

In 1621, Shahjahan disobeyed Nurjahan and Jahangir and refused to be diverted into the futile Afghan campaign. He had killed Khusrav in 1622 only to maintain his own claim to Mughal throne. Khurram refused to go to the frontier and Nurjahan had no option other than to support Shaharyar's claim. She called Parwez, Jahangir's second son, to Agra and made him the Commander.

The details of Khurram's revolt are described by Jahangir himself. He records that, "Intelligence now arrived that Khurram had seized upon some of the jagirs of Nur Jahan Begum and Prince Shaharyar...I have been offended by



his delaying at the Fort of Mandu, and by his improper and foolish statements in his letters and I had perceived by his insolence that his mind was estranged. Upon hearing of this further intelligence, I saw that, notwithstanding all the favour and kindness I had shown him, his mind was perverted. I accordingly sent Raja Roz-afzum, one of my oldest servants, to inquire into the reasons of this boldness and presumption. I also sent him a farman, directing him to attend to his own affairs and not to depart from the strict line of the duty. He was to be content with the jagirs that had been bestowed upon him from the Imperial Exchequer. I warned him not to come to me, but to send all the troops which had been required from him for the campaign against Kandahar. If he acted contrary to my commands, he would afterwards have to repent...Letters arrived from Itibar Khan and other of my officers whom I had left at Agra, stating that Khurram persisted in his perverse course, and preferring the way of disobedience to the path of duty, had taken a decided step on the road to perdition by marching upon Agra...A letter from Asaf Khan also arrived, stating that this ungrateful son had torn away the veil of decency, and had broken into open rebellion; that he (Asaf Khan) had received no certain intelligence of his movements, so, not considering it expedient to move the treasure, he had set out alone to join me.

He further records that, "On receiving their intelligence, I crossed the river at Sultanpur and marched to inflict punishment on this illstarred son (Siyabhakht). I issued an order that from this time forth he should be called 'wretch' (bi daulat)...The pen cannot describe all that I have done for him, nor can I recount my own grief, or mention the anguish and weakness which oppress me in this hot climate, which is so injurious to my health, especially during these journeys and marchings which I am obliged to make in pursuit of him who is no longer my son. Many nobles, too, who have been long disciplined under me, and would now have been available against the Uzbecks and the Kazilbashs have through this perfidy, met with their due punishment. May God in His mercy enable

me to bear up against all these calamities. What is most grievous for me to bear is this, that this is the very time when my sons and nobles should have emulated each other in recovering Kandahar and Khorasan, the loss of which so deeply affect the honour of this Empire, and to effect which this 'wretch' is the only obstacle, so that the invasion of Kandahar is indefinitely postponed. I trust in God that I may be shortly relieved of this anxiety."<sup>38</sup>

He narrates the event that, "On the 1st Isfandarmuz, I received a letter from Itibar Khan, informing me that the rebel had advanced with all speed to the neighbourhood of Agra, my capital, in the hope of getting possession of it before it could be put in a state of preparation. On reaching Fatehpur, he found that his hope was vain, so he remained there. He was accompanied by Khan-Khanan (Mirza Abdur Rahim Khan) and his son, and by many other amirs who held office in the Dakhin and in Gujarat, and had now entered the path of rebellion and perfidy...The rebels took nine lacs of rupees from the house of Lashkar Khan, and everywhere they seized upon whatever they found serviceable in the possession of my adherents. Khan-Khanan who had held the exalted dignity of being my tutor, had now turned rebell, and the 70th year of his age had blackened his face with ingratitude. But he was by nature a rebel and traitor. His father (Bairam Khan), at the close of his days, had acted in the same shameful way towards my revered father. He had but followed the course of his father, and disgraced himself in his old age—

'The wolf's whelp will grow a wolf,

E'en though reared with man himself"<sup>39</sup>

After I had passed through Sirhand, troops came flocking from all directions, and by the time I reached Delhi, such an army had assembled that the whole country was covered with men as far as the eye could reach. Upon being informed that the rebel had advanced from Fatehpur, I marched to Delhi."<sup>40</sup>

It was the master strategy of Nurjahan that the rebels could be defeated at Balochpur to the south of Delhi in 1623. Shahjahan ran away to seek shelter in Malwa and then proceeded to Deccan to seek in vain the help of Malik Amber. From there he fled to Bengal via Telingana. Ultimately Shahjahan occupied Bihar and captured the great fortress of Rohtas. Nurjahan did not lose heart and with courage and determination faced the crisis and sent a strong army forthwith to Allahabad to finally settle scores with him. The army was led by Mahabat Khan and Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khana. A capable Commander-in-Chief as Mahabat Khan was, he took no time in defeating Khurram. Khurram escaped to Deccan leaving Mumtaz Mahal in the fort of Bengal. In 1625 he tried to conspire and form an alliance with Ahmadnagar as Mahabat Khan sided with Bijapur. Khurram suddenly got ill and as Muhammad Hadi puts it, "The error of his conduct now became apparent to him and he felt that he must beg forgiveness of his father for his offences."<sup>41</sup>

Khurram wrote a letter to Jahangir beseeching him to pardon his undutiful behaviour. On Nurjahan's insistence Jahangir replied to his letter in March, 1626, conveying that he should send two of his sons, Dara and Aurangzeb, to the royal Court at Lahore and surrender the forts of Rohtas and Asir Garh. Shahjahan went to receive the imperial messenger, prostrated himself before the Farman and placed it on his head. He at once wrote to his agent, Muzaffar Khan, to surrender Rohtas and ordered Hayat Khan to deliver Asir Garh to the imperial officers appointed for the purpose. Dara aged 10 and Aurangzeb 8 were duly sent to the royal Court with offerings of jewels, chased arms and elephants, that valued ten lacs of rupees. They arrived at the court in Lahore in June 1626 and were placed under the care of Nurjahan Begum. Shahjahan himself with his wife and his youngest son, Murad Bakhsh, proceeded to Nasik and gained time to poise: calm and normalize the situation.<sup>42</sup>

The futile rebellion of Shahjahan ended after three years of bloodshed and a wanton wastage of men and money. The

Imperial forces came out victorious on account of the master strategy and clever intellect of Nurjahan Begam, who reposed full confidence in Mahabat Khan and prince Parvez, who worked together in quelling the rebellion which was so necessary in the interest of Nurjahan and the state. But the implications of the mutual clash within the royal family did not prove useful and deeply injured the imperial interests in Afghanistan and other strategic places on the north western frontier. It also encouraged the states in Deccan to be rebellious again and throw a challenge to Mughal authority as ever they had been doing in the past. Many distinguished historians have charged empress Nurjahan Begum of alienating Khurram which does not seem to be true and well-founded. Nurjahan desired to curb the growing ambition of prince Shahjahan who after some of his victories became power drunk and disregarded the authority of Jahangir. Her political strategy was directed in the general interest of the Mughal state. So long Jahangir was alive, Khurram's revolt was nothing but an effort to illegally seize power and concentrate authority in his hands. A chivalrous, daring and steadfast royal consort, Nurjahan outwitted Khurram in his desperate attempt to dislodge the ailing Jahangir and came out successful. Her sole object was to maintain and retain the imperial glory and glamour of her loving husband. However, the royal victory led to a colossal damage of human and economic resources both. But, for this devastation, Nurjahan alone was not responsible. The rebellions of Mughal princes to attain suzerainty has not been uncommon in Mughal history. Thus it cannot be derived that Nurjahan Begum was responsible for Khurram's rebellion and fanned the flames of fierce war, plunging the country into incessant struggle for throne. Prince Khurram's ambitions and his act of indiscipline, disobedience to the aged father can not be taken as lightly as many a modern writers have tried to do. Neither the contemporary chroniclers nor the modern scholars put forward the theory that Nurjahan ever aspired to become herself the ruler or forwarded her own candidature for the throne. Circumstances forced her to prolong the war only to save the dignity of the Mughal throne. Yet the results proved far more damaging

than she ever thought of. The success of Mahabat Khan and prince Parvez against prince Shahajahan culminated into another shrewd alliance which at a later stage threatened the integrity of the Mughal Empire. Nurjahan again set out to curb the forces that emerged as a fresh challenge on the political scene and displayed her great diplomatic still and strategy.

## References

1. Dr. A.L. Srivastava : The Mughal Empire, pp. 266-67.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. R.P. Tripathi, Rise and Fall of Mughal Empire, p. 369.
5. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 216.
6. 'When he had hastened to the capture of the Deccan he had obtained the title of Shah, and now, in reward for this distinguished service, I gave him a mansab of 30,000 personal and 20,000 horse and bestowed on him the title of Shah Jahan. An order was given that henceforth they should place a chair in the paradise-resembling assemblies near my throne for my son to sit upon. This was a special favour for my son, as it had never been the custom heretofore!  
*Ibid* , Vol. I, p. 395.
7. P. Della Valle, 'The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India' (trans. Edward Grey) Vol. I, p. 54.
8. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 22.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 270-71.  
Khafi Khan, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 269.
10. Shah Nawaz Khan, Maasir-ul-Umara, Vol. I. (Persian Text, trs. Beveridge and Beni Prasad) Calcutta, 1941, pp. 287-295.
11. Beale, T.W. An Oriental Biographical Dictionary, London, 1910, p. 81.
12. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 202.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
14. Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, (Elliot & Dowson), *op. cit.*, vol. VI, p. 398.
15. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri. Vol. I, p. 228.
16. Maasir-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
18. Lanepoole, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
19. Rekha Misra, Women and Contemporary Politics, Delhi, 1965, p. 63.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
21. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-301.
22. Rekha Misra, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
23. R.P. Tripath, *op. cit.*, p. 422.
24. Khafi Khan's Muntakhab-ul-Lubab and Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, Vol. I, p. 329.
25. Muhammad Hadi, Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, (Elliot and Dowson), *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 396.
26. Jahangir records, "I was obliged to pursue Khusrav to Punjab and the capital and interior of the country were denuded of troops. I was obliged to write to Parvez directing him to return to protect Agra and the neighbourhood and to remain there, so the campaign against the Rana was suspended. (E. & D.) *op. cit.*, Vol. VI. p. 336.
27. Aziz Koka was the father-in-law of Khusrav and Jahangir nick named him as one of the hypocrites and old wolves of the state.
28. Tujuk-i-Jahangiri (Rogers and Beveridge) IIrd ed. 1978, Vol. I, p. 273.
29. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
30. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 281.
31. Waqiat-i-Jahangiri (E. & D.) *op. cit.*, Vol. VI. p. 380.
32. Waqiat-i-Jahangiri (E. & D.) *op. cit.*, Vol. VI. pp. 428-29.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 525-26.
34. Under Jahaagir's orders, his body was later carried to Agra from where it was taken to Allahabad and buried by the side of his mother's tomb in Khusrav Bagh. Smith *op. cit.*, p. 376.
35. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 308.
36. Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-308.
37. Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, (Elliot and Dowson), *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 383.

38. Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, (Elliot and Dowson), *op. cit.*, Vol. VI. p. 384.
39. This verse of Shaikh Sadi is given in Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, trans. Rogers and Ed. Beveridge) also—  
     ‘In the end a wolf’s cub becomes a wolf  
     Although he grow up with man.’  
     Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, p. 385.
41. Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, (Elliot and Dowson), *op. cit.*, Vol. VI. p. 385.
41. Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, (Elliot and Dowson), *op. cit.*, Vol. VI. p. 386.
42. Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

## *Diplomacy on Trial*

The intrigues of the orthodox nobility and the indolent attitude of the princes made Nurjahan Begum, realize that she should not remain complacent, inactive and a mere spectator in bewilderment. She thought that time was ripe for her to think and act. Jahangir's health was fast deteriorating which was a great cause of worry to her. To her utter disgust, she found that even those who were once so sincerely devoted to Jahangir were led astray to find the right opportunity to clinch some sort of diplomatic manipulation to meet their respective ends in the worst effected crisis that the crown faced then. Containing her personal affectations in heart, she displayed immaculate prowess, clarity of mind and resolute determination in managing the affairs of the state and saw that peace reigned and law and order retained in the Empire.

As a shrewd states woman, Nurjahan could foresee the changing attitudes of the commanders, notably that of Mahabat Khan. As a realist, she concluded that Khurram's rise, for which she was instrumental, added to the political problems, divided the family of Mirza Ghiyas Beg and became responsible for a civil war.<sup>1</sup> She watched with concern that for the murder of prince Khusray which was mourned by the



whole country, Jahangir could not punish Khurram for this ghastly act.<sup>2</sup> She identified the political issues and understood the malacious designs of such persons as were bent upon creating instability just for the sake of their personal ambitions. She found that the internal situation of the State worsened due to Khurram's unwarranted action which caused permanent anxiety to Jahangir and also enabled the intriguing nobility to direct a tirade against her.

Besides, Nurjahan was clever enough to read in between the lines the texture and the mood of the Ulemas who sided with prince Khurram only for his prominent orthodox Sunni beliefs. She knew that her liberal and tolerant attitude were obnoxiously condemned by them. She was also convinced that her influence upon Jahangir was not palatable to the 'Mullas and Maulanas who did not appreciate the generous policy of the Mughal State towards people of all castes and creeds.'<sup>3</sup> She, therefore, grew suspicious of the shrewd and malacious designs and machinations of both the Ulemas and the nobility. Another fact glossed over even by contemporary historians of Jahangir's Court has been the growing dislike among the Sunni nobles towards the more capable Persian countries in the Imperial court who at Nurjahan's instance were playing more decisive roles than the indigenous nobles. The religious belief of the Sunni aristocracy could not tolerate Shia predominance in the Imperial Court. They wished to fish in the troubled waters. Shahjahan gave them the lead. He, inspite of his marriage with the beautiful Arjumand Bano Begum, the grand daughter of Mirza Ghiyas Beg and neice of Nurjahan Begum, became averse to Persian nobles in particular and the Shias in general. He played up to the Sunni sentiments for his own ambitious gains and there grew a subtle group enough to give resistance to the liberal policies and disturb the political equilibrium erstwhile maintained in the Mughal state. It should also be noted that the period of Khurram's revolt was almost the same when empress Nurjahan Begum suffered from personal grief on the passing away of her parents who had served as a rock like foundation

upon which Nurjahan had built her political edifice. Apart from being her beloved and venerated parents, they were friends, philosopher and guides for her in all what she did after her phenomenal rise to power. Mirza Ghiyas Beg and Asmat Begum commanded great respect in the royal family specially among the youths who revered them for their age and wisdom. The old couple had always been in a position to turn the table in their daughter's favour whenever they found a storm brewing in the tea cup. They always gave sober and sound advice to their daughter keeping healthy restraints on her.

After the suppression of Khurram's revolt, Nurjahan had to encounter a tougher enemy in Mahabat Khan, who had distinguished himself as a great military leader. It was he, who along with Prince Parvez, contained Khurram and actually dispelled his evil designs and reduced his strength considerably.<sup>4</sup> But in order to gain real political power, he desired to instal Prince Parvez on the throne, on the ground that he was the eldest surviving son of Jahangir and as such deserve succession.

Mahabat Khan was an ambitious and able noble and a reputed commander, who contained Khurram and made him to realize his strength, bringing home the fact that the emperor was supreme. Mahabat Khan's loyalty towards Jahangir could not be doubled but he could never relish the predominance of Nurjahan in matters of military as well as civil administration ever since her rise to political power. According to *Intikhab-i-Jahangir-Shahi* :

"At this time the influence of Nurjahan Begum had attained such a height that the entire management of the Empire was entrusted to her hands. Mahabat Khan thought proper therefore to represent as follows : That to His Majesty and all the world it is well-known that this servant Mahabat Khan was brought up only by His Majesty, and that he has no concern with anybody else. Everyone knows that Mahabat Khan presumes much upon His Majesty's kindness;

and he now begs truly and faithfully to represent what he thinks proper, instigated by his loyalty, and for the sake of His Majesty's good name..... The whole world is surprised that such a wise and sensible Emperor, as Jahangir, should permit a woman to have so great an influence over him....."<sup>5</sup>

A traditional Sunni Muslim as Mahabat Khan was, the predominance of a woman in matters of politics was never palatable to him. He always resented Nurjahan's usurpation of political power. He thought Nurjahan to be just an ordinary woman of limited calibre, whom Jahangir had elevated to such a high political status which she hardly deserved. According to him, she was an imposter who had mobilized strength not on merit but by the sheer opportunity she could avail, on account of her marriage to Jahangir. On the other hand, the sovereign power and political success that Nurjahan attained, gave her superb confidence and she believed that she had surpassed all and everyone in the technique of diplomacy and in the planning of military strategy. Dr. Beni Prasad remarks, "Her impervious instincts strengthened by years of sovereign power, prompted her to perpetuate her sway."<sup>6</sup> But the fact remained that Mahabat Khan did not like the political supremacy of Nurjahan and spoke to Jahangir time out of number in the plainest terms to redeem his fame by emancipating himself from 'the petticoat influence'.<sup>7</sup> Mahabat Khan, after his success against Shahjahan virtually assumed the role of the leader of the dissenting and dissatisfied nobility.

Expressing the demands of the dissident nobles he said to Jahangir that "the whole world is surprised that such a wise and sensible emperor as Jahangir, should permit a woman to have such a great influence over him."<sup>8</sup> Nurjahan, a diplomat of high order, could understand the designs of Mahabat Khan and envisaging an offensive from him she decided to act promptly to preempt the Khan's manoeuvres much before he could initiate any action. So in

September, 1625, when prince Parvez and the General Mahabat Khan, were encamped at Sarangpur on their way to Burhanpur, she got an Imperial Farman issued, transferring Mahabat Khan to the Governorship of Bengal and appointing Khan-i-Jahan Lodi to succeed him as Vakil to Parvez.<sup>9</sup> The order was communicated to prince Parvez by the Imperial messenger, Fidai Khan at Sarangpur. The Prince was in no mood to part company with Mahabat Khan and could understand the inherent political implications underlying the Farman. He refused to part with Mahabat Khan and in his place to accept Khan Jahan Lodi as his counsellor.

When Fidai Khan conveyed the blunt refusal to the Imperial government, Nurjahan and Asaf Khan were dismayed and adopted a more stern attitude towards the Prince. Another Farman was immediately issued warning Parvez against refractory conduct and calling upon him to render implicit obedience. 'If Mahabat Khan was unwilling to go to Bengal, he was to return to the royal court, and the prince was to stay with his Amirs at Burhanpur'.<sup>10</sup> Frightened by the tone of the Imperial Mandate and the sinister diplomatic design engineered by Nurjahan, prince Parvez yielded to the royal orders and Khan-i-Jahan Lodi hastily proceeded to Burhanpur to take up the new assignment as Vakil to Prince Parvez.

Mahabat Khan was also left with no other option than to bow before the royal orders and readily proceed towards Bengal. In the next step, Nurjahan, on the advice of Asaf Khan, called upon Mahabat Khan to send to the court the elephants he was alleged to have obtained in Bengal and Bihar during the revolt of Shahjahan. He was further required to furnish the account of the large sums forfeited to the State from the dismissal of disloyal jagirdars.<sup>11</sup> A special imperial agent Arab Dast Ghaib was sent to see the implementation of the royal orders. He was not only authorised to seize the elephants and take control of the accounts but also directed to despatch Mahabat Khan to present himself

before the royal court immediately if the messenger found any disobedience or bungling.<sup>12</sup>

But Mahabat Khan was in different mood of defiance and disobedience. He was infuriated on receiving the royal orders and set on to rebellion, being convinced that behind all this provocation was Nurjahan Begum. He felt humiliated, the way he was being deprived of his property and charged with embezzlement of Govt. money. The imperial orders were indicative of his total ruin. He was offended to learn that his faithful services rendered to the Emperor during Khurram's revolt were lost sight of specially when it was he who singularly saved the empire from great danger and grave disaster. Jahangir was critically ill and just depended upon what Nurjahan thought and did. With this circumstantial shift of paramountcy from the Emperor to the queen, the question of any rapprochement and reconciliation between the two master mind diplomats did not arise and the result was inevitable in the clash between the two giants—the queen and the General.

Determined to take revenge and redeem his honour and prepared for any extremities and consequences, he marched towards the Imperial court with an efficient five thousand Rajput strength.<sup>13</sup>

The emperor then was holidaying in Kashmir which he left in September, 1625, arrived at Lahore on October 12, 1625 and set out again for Kabul in March, 1626. He was encamped on the bank of river Jhelum when Mahabat Khan, arrived in the vicinity of the royal Camp.<sup>14</sup> His sudden appearance at the head of a Rajput force naturally produced something like a consternation in Jahangir's Camp. He sent the intimation to the king that he complied the royal Farman and desired to see the emperor. Smelling something fishy, Nurjahan issued severe orders to Mahabat Khan through a farman. It was demanded from Mahabat Khan to submit elephants to the Emperor at once and many other serious charges were

levelled against him, such as that he married his daughter to the son of Khwaja Umar Naqshbandi without first obtaining the customary royal permission. Mahabat Khan's dowry to Barkhurdar<sup>16</sup> was forfeited to the State. Fidai Khan was duly commissioned to recover it and deposit it in the Imperial treasury.<sup>16</sup> All these charges alienated and infuriated Mahabat Khan so much that he decided to pounce upon the chief architect of the conspiracy against him. The queen Empress Nurjahan Begum.

On the arrival of Mahabat Khan on the scene. Jahangir, decided to march ahead at once. All officers, soldiers, and domestics, the arms, and the treasure were safely transported over the bridge over Jhelum. Jahangir, his family, Motamid Khan, Mir Mansur, and a few servants and eunuchs alone remained in the camp on the left bank. They were to cross the river next morning. Seeing the opportune moment to avenge for the insults and humiliations meted out to him, Mahabat Khan under master strategy, decided to imprison the Emperor. His sudden swarp turned the tables and brought the Emperor under his full control.<sup>17</sup>

Mahabat Khan furiously and desperately took the drastic step as it had become almost impossible for him to reach the Emperor to persuade him to get out of clutches of Nurjahan-Asaf Khan combine and readily do as he dictated. "If Jahangir must be controlled by somebody", Mahabat Khan was determined that it would be he and not the ambitious woman named Nurjahan.<sup>18</sup>

Mahabat Khan captured the bridge and did not allow any one to cross it from the other side. In case of an armed attack he decided to set fire to it. Taking a select body of men with him, he advanced to the Imperial camp. The coup was sudden, dramatic and awful, Motamid Khan, the eye witness chronicler has given all the details of the coup as below :

'A cry arose that Mahabat Khan was coming, and the thought occurred to me that perhaps he had gone to the door of the private apartments. Then it was said that he had left the private apartments, and had come to the State apartment, to give expression to his feelings. On reaching the entrance of my ante room, he inquired how matters stood. When his voice reached my ear, I drew my sword, and went out of the tent. When he saw me, he addressed me by name, and asked after His Majesty. I saw that he had with him about 100 Rajputs on foot carrying spears and shields and leading his horse in the midst of them; but the dust prevented me from seeing any one's face distinctly. He hastened to the chief entrance, and I entered the State apartment by a side door. I saw a few men of the guard in the State room, and three or four eunuchs standing at the door of the bath-room. Mahabat Khan rode to the door of the State room and alighted. When he proceeded towards the bath-room, he had about 200 Rajputs with him.'"<sup>19</sup>

Motamid continues the narration "the servants who were in attendance informed him of this daring action. The emperor then came out, and took his seat in a palanquin which was in waiting for him. Mahabat Khan advanced respectfully to the door of the Palki and said, "I have assured myself that escape from the malice and implacable hatred of Asaf Khan is impossible, and that I shall be put to death in shame and ignominy. I have therefore, boldly and presumptuously thrown myself upon Your Majesty's protection. If I deserve death or punishment, give the order that I may suffer it in your presence.'"<sup>20</sup>

The Rajput soldiers completely surrounded the apartments and practically held the Emperor and his few attendants, including Arab Dast Ghaib, in confinement. Motamid continues "the emperor twice laid his hand on his sword and seemed intent on cutting off Mahabat Khan's head, but he was each time dissuaded from the mad venture by Mansur Bada-khsi, who said in Turkish which Mahabat Khan could not

understand, 'This is a time for fortitude, leave the punishment of this wicked faithless fellow to a just God : a day of retribution will come! The Rajputs helped Mahabat Khan who occupied the royal apartments within and without so that no one but the servants could approach the emperor Jahangir who was now a prisoner.'<sup>21</sup>

Apprehensive of a commotion among the people who loved the emperor with personal devotion and reverence and would be terribly excited by any suspicion of personal injury to him, Mahabat Khan asked his captive to take his usual ride for sport, "so that", he added with his usual frankness, "your slave may go out in attendance upon you, and it may appear that this bold step has been taken by Your Majesty's order".<sup>22</sup>

The emperor was in no position to disobey but still he refused to debase the Imperial dignity by mounting Mahabat's horse as the General urged him to do, and called for his own horse. At the same time he expressed a desire to go inside to dress for the hunt and probably also to consult the resourceful Nurjahan, but Mahabat firmly refused to permit him to go inside.<sup>23</sup>

The contemporary chronicler further records "the Emperor mounted and moved from the tents, guarded by Mahabat Khan and his Rajputs. When they had proceeded two arrow shots distance, Mahabat urged the emperor to mount an elephant just brought forward for the purpose in order that he might be seen the better by the people. Once more the emperor obeyed. In front of the howdah sat one of the most trusted Rajput followers of the general while two others took their seats behind it. Muqarrab Khan, an adherent of the emperor, came, struggled for a seat, received in the forehead a wound which drenched his clothes in blood, but was ultimately crowded into the howdah beside his master. The faithful Imperial cup-bearer also came out and walked up to mount the elephant in order to supply one of the essential needs of



his master. Spears in hand, the Rajputs tried to prevent him but he seized fast hold of the howdah and was ultimately allowed to mount."<sup>24</sup>

In this fashion they had proceeded for some distance when Gajpat Khan, the master of the Imperial elephant stables, brought the Imperial elephant with himself in front of, and his son behind the howdah. Suspecting an attempt at rescue, Mahabat Khan signalled to his Rajputs and the two innocent men were instantly killed. The example quieted all. In order and silence the procession advanced to Mahabat's camp where the emperor was made to dismount and placed under the guard of the General's sons.

Mahabat Khan had wrought history. He captured the Mughal Emperor when the empire was still at its zenith. After imprisonment of the Emperor, Mahabat Khan thought about Nurjahan, the real power behind the throne. He returned with the Emperor to the Camp to imprison Nurjahan but to his utter dismay she wisely escaped. Mahabat Khan then proceeded to seize the royal relatives and prince Shaharyar. Shaharyar was nowhere to be found. Mahabat Khan suspected Chhaju's hand in their flight and signalled to the Rajputs to kill him.

Nurjahan Begum, realizing the acute danger, crossed the bridge in disguise with her trusted eunuch. Thinking that Mahabat Khan would go to any extreme to enthrone Parvez, she began to think of any device to rescue Jahangir from his clutches.<sup>25</sup>

She hurried straight to her brother Asaf Khan. Sternly upbraiding him for his negligence, she summoned a council of all the principal Amirs and Officers.<sup>26</sup> She assertively and boldly charged them of neglect of duty and reproved, "What never entered into the imagination of anyone, has come to pass and now you stand stricken with shame for your conduct before God and man, You must do your best to repair this evil, and advise what course to pursue."<sup>27</sup>

The nobles owned their mistake, and devised out methods to free Jahangir. They decided to attack upon Mahabat Khan's Camp with whatever army they had at the moment. Jahangir knew the real strength of Mahabat Khan and perceived the folly of the whole venture. News had reached him of the precarious enterprise of Nurjahan to release him the next morning. The Rajput force of Mahabat Khan was very strong for such forces as Nurjahan could muster. The bridge had been burnt, and to cross a flooded stream in the face of a powerful, well-posted enemy was hazardous. Mahabat Khan gave the impression that the emperor had willingly entered his protection to shake off the shackles put on him by his wife and brother-in-law. His master diplomacy was to alienate Nurjahan quietly from Jahangir and curb Asaf Khan and Shaharyar to use any influence.

Mahabat Khan allowed Jahangir to send several messages through Muqarrab Khan and others to Nurjahan on the opposite bank, "warning them against passing over the river to give battle, for to do so would be a great mistake, productive of nothing but evil and repentance."<sup>28</sup> In order to convince them of the genuineness of his messages, Jahangir sent his own signet ring through Mir Mansur.

Nurjahan did not listen to the advice of Jahangir. The nobles were full of shame at their careless and callous behaviour. Determined to free Jahangir they thought that even if the projected attack would fail it would atleast save them from "charges of cowardice and of tame desertion of their emperor". They suspected all the messages and the sending of the signet itself only as the diplomatic tactics employed by the General Mahabat Khan who wanted to befool them and desired to slacken their efforts to release their dear Emperor.<sup>29</sup>

Fidai Khan, once a follower of Mahabat Khan, had earned the favour of Nurjahan and had become her trusted man. He galloped, on the first receipt of the news of his master's capture, to the head of the bridge, and finding it burnt, resolved to cross over under cover of darkness and steal

the emperor out of Mahabat Khan's cantonment. He took with him some two dozen followers who plunged their horses into the river just opposite to the Imperial camp.<sup>30</sup>

The rapid current swept away six of them with their horses. Unable to proceed any further many of them returned disappointed—Fidai Khan and seven others, leaving their horses to perish, swam across to the opposite bank.<sup>31</sup> Mahabat Khan's army was vigilant and too strong for them. Four of them were killed, while the other four, including Fidai Khan himself, galloped back and 'repassed the river with the same dash and spirit with which they had crossed it.'

Motamid Khan, the eye witness chronicler, narrates the events in detail. He says, "In the morning of Sunday, the 21st Jamat II. (March, 1626) the Imperialist camp was in all stir and bustle. Under the lead of Nurjahan Begum, seated on an elephant with the infant daughter of Shaharyar on her lap, the Imperialists proceeded to cross the river." But unfortunately the ford which Ghazi, the commander of the boats had discovered and recommended to them, proved to be one of the worst, since it contained several large, deep pools. As a result, before the middle of the stream was reached, all order and discipline was washed away. Meanwhile the opposite bank was lined by Mahabat Khan's forces in embattled array with huge elephants in front. The Imperialists were separated into numerous, isolated, confused groups. Asaf Khan, Khwaja Abdul Hasan and Eradat Khan found themselves before a spot on the bank where the enemy were very strongly posted."<sup>32</sup>

Motamid further adds "Fidai Khan crossed over at a ford about an arrow-shot lower down. Abu Talib, son of Asaf Khan and a considerable number of men passed at a ford still lower down. The horses were obliged to swim, the accountrements got wet and the harness disordered. Some of them had reached the shore and some were still in the water, when the enemy came down upon them, their elephants leading. Asaf Khan and Khwaja Abdul Hasan were yet in the

middle of the river when the men in advance of them recoiled. I was paralysed at this sight as if a millstone had been revolving on the top of my head. No one cared for or gave ear to another, no one showed any resolution. The officers in a panic rushed off in disorder, not knowing where they were or where they led their men."<sup>33</sup>

"Nurjahan had boldly plunged into the river to fight Mahabat Khan. Horses, camels, soldiers and carriages were jostling each other in the river and pressing to the opposite shore. She inspired her soldiers not to delay and strike boldly forward, so that by their advance the enemy may be repulsed and take to flight. The army of Mahabat Khan pushed forward their elephants and the horsemen came from the rear, dashed into the water with their swords. Our handful of men, being without leaders, turned and fled, and the swords of the enemy tinged the water with their blood."<sup>34</sup>

Nurjahan, herself, was not immune from enemy's attack. Her infant grand-daughter received an arrow in the arm.<sup>35</sup> Her elephant, as soon as she approached the bank, received two sword cuts on the trunk and, as he turned back, was again wounded twice or thrice behind with spears. The Rajput horsemen were alert to capture her. She ordered the Pheelwan to take the hurt animal in the water. The Rajputs left their horses and began to swim. But Nurjahan's courage was superb.

The Rajputs had to return disappointed. The elephant carrying Nurjahan swam across to the bank. She proceeded to extract the arrow from the infant's arm when her maids joined and helped her.<sup>36</sup> Khwaja Abul Hasan galloped to her aid but facing fury of the waves somehow saved his own life with the help of a Kashmiri boatman. But Asaf Khan's party returned in an utterly demoralized condition. The main attack was disastrously repulsed. Fidai Khan's small party, under the inspiration of their heroic leader, performed some remarkable exploits. They reached the shore in order, discipline and safety and engaged the Rajput body stationed on the spot. To

quote the eyewitness Chronicler, "Fidai Khan stopped at the entrance, and sent a discharge of arrows inside. Some of the arrows fell in the courtyard of the private apartments near His Majesty, when Mukhlis Khan placed himself before the throne, and made his body a shield for the protection of the Emperor. Several of Fidai Khan's supporters like Sayyid Muzaffar and Wazir Beg were killed and like Sayyid Abdul Ghafur and Eradat were severely wounded. The own horse of Fidai Khan received four wounds. Finding that he would not succeed to reach the emperor, he passed through the camp and went up the river."<sup>37</sup>

The efforts to free Jahangir from the clutches of Mahabat Khan failed as the leaders did not have the capacity to reorganize their scattered soldiers. Some of them fled away without even performing the duty of defending the right bank of the river against the Rajputs. To take the women and maid servants to a place of safety was a tremendous task. The duty was entrusted to Motamid Khan and a few others whose showers of arrows effectually prevented the enemy from crossing over to their side.

Asaf Khan's cowardice was proved because he was bothered for his own safety rather than that of the Emperor and Nurjahan. Asaf Khan hated Mahabat Khan and Mahabat Khan disliked Asaf Khan, yet Asaf Khan after his failure in the attack disregarded the interests of the rest of the Camp and thought of saving his own life. Motamid Khan wanted to stop, presumably to help him in the task of keeping the enemy off, but he would neither stop nor listen to him. With two or three hundred soldiers, a few camp-followers and some servants, Asaf Khan fled precipitately to the fort of Attack in his Jagir and shut himself up there.<sup>38</sup>

Another reputed noble and supporter of Nurjahan, Khwaja Abul Hasan, after concealing himself for a while, at last joined Mahabat Khan, swore fidelity and even attempted to persuade Eradat Khan and Motamid Khan to follow his example. The two withstood his pressure for a while but

ultimately gave way. After struggling hard to help the Emperor in vain Fidayi Khan also withdrew and went to his sons at Rohtas.

With all the faithful generals going astray, either joining the enemy or fleeing away, Nurjahan was left alone, deserted and desolate. It was hard for her to bear the separation of her husband whom she doted and loved so much. She realized that her cause was irretrievably lost, yet she made one more attempt but this time not through any armed resistance but by adopting class diplomacy to out-wit the General. She voluntarily surrendered to Mahabat Khan and was allowed to join the Emperor in his camp-shelter.<sup>39</sup>

Secure and victorious as Mahabat Khan was, he assumed the virtual charge of the Mughal government. The regular army, including the Imperial Ahadis, were duly taken under his control. For the moment, Mahabat Khan acted as the master of the Mughal empire.<sup>40</sup>

Nurjahan's authority over the Emperor rested on love and devotion, but Mahabat Khan's sway had no better foundation than force. Mahabat Khan had succeeded in ending Nurjahan's glamour and expended her eclipse. Rai Gowardhan Surajdhvaj, who was once a favourite servant of Etmad-ud-daula and then a faithful steward to Nurjahan joined as the principal lieutenant of Mahabat Khan. He gave clue to their hidden wealth which was immediately confiscated. Asaf Khan alone was the remaining enemy who had sheltered himself at Attock. Mahabat Khan sent a body of Ahadis, some Rajputs, and contingents of the neighbouring chiefs, all under the command of his son Bihroz and a Rajput captain to besiege the fort of Attock. He assured secretly to Asaf Khan the security of life and property. Relying on the word of Mahabat Khan, he surrendered and promised, on oath, to uphold Mahabat Khan's side.<sup>41</sup>

Mahabat Khan then forced the emperor to resume his journey to Kabul with him. When they crossed the Indus at

Attock, Mahabat Khan underwent the formality of receiving the Imperial permission, went to the fort, brought out Asaf Khan and his son Abu Talib or Shaista Khan and placed them under the charge of his own men. Several cruel executions were made. Khaliq, nephew of Khwaja Shamsuddin, Mohammad Khwaja and Mohammad Taqi, once the paymsster or Bakhshi of Shahjahan, were put to death on account of their close attachment to Asaf Khan. The old Mulla Muhammad Tathi, the spiritual preceptor of Asaf Khan, was imprisoned, enchained and later killed ingloriously.<sup>42</sup>

The Imperial cortege resumed its march from Attock and halted for some time at Jalalabad, where the emperor was visited by members of a tribe with strange ceremonies, manners, and customs. Motamid Khan records that, "on Sunday, the 21st Shaban 1035 May, 1626 the camp arrived at Kabul and the emperor, seated on an elephant, passed through the city scattering gold and silver in the usual fashion on the famous Shahdara garden. Shortly after, he visited and prayed at the tomb of the late Emperor Babur. He also visited the tombs of Mirza Hindal, Mohammad Hakim and other ancestors and paid his humage."<sup>43</sup>

When the authority of Mahabat Khan was fully established, Jahangir was left with no option other than to reconcile with the appalling circumstances and obey the command of a man to whom he used to command. Mahabat Khan recognized Jahangir as king only in name but the real power rested with him. Nurjahan and Asaf Khan were both his captives. No strong organized party could be formed without a leader to oppose Mahabat Khan's impertinence. The nobles, hostile to Nurjahan, secretly welcomed the interruption of her sway by Mahabat Khan's machinations and deriding step.<sup>44</sup>

Strange is the fact, that inspite of the tolerant policy followed by Nurjahan and Jahangir, the Hindus of the empire felt satisfaction and took pride on the fact that the Rajputs could exert some influence over Mahabat Khan. The Khan-i-

Khana, one of the Mahabat's bitterest opponents, was ordered to be seized while on his way to his jagir in Kannauj. Muzafar Khan, Subedar of Agra, was ordered to keep a strong watch on Dara and Aurangzeb, when they were on their way to the Imperial Court. To secure Punjab, Sadiq, was appointed the Governor of the province and he was Mahabat Khan's foster brother.<sup>45</sup>

Shahjahan was stirred and astonished at the speedy events in the north. Defeated and crushed as he was, he was too weak to pose a serious threat to Mahabat Khan and he preferred to follow the policy of wait and watch for the back drop of this melodrama. The Mughal sovereignty in the South had become supreme. The warfare on the north-western border had not ended, but the situation was under control. Mahabat Khan was lucky for the time being as peace and harmony prevailed in the empire ever since he snatched power from Nurjahan and made Jahangir a tool in his hands. But Mahabat Khan was always apprehensive and not sure of the incessant favours of fortune. However, at this moment of his triumph, he was drawing two fold pleasure, ecstasy of power and dominance over a proud woman who had tried her best to ruin him. But hardly did he understand that the fertile brain of Nurjahan was sure to devise out a way of emancipation for her husband and restoration of power for herself. As the time rolled on, the influence exercised by the Rajputs over Mahabat Khan and their control over the government through him became a potent cause of irritation to other Imperial officers and the muslim nobility.

The first breach in Mahabat Khan's power came from the discontented nobles. The Rajput's tyranny over the people of Kabul was exaggerated to rouse deep resentment not only among the people but also among the Ahadis and the Muslim troopers, with the result that the Rajputs and the Ahadis started nourishing bitter hostility and dislike towards one another.<sup>46</sup> Nurjahan exploited the situation by winning over nobles and recruiting loyal soldiers quietly.<sup>47</sup>



The contemporary Chronicler narrates, "One day, some Rajputs, in violation of the general rule, turned out their horses to graze in one of the royal hunting-grounds near Kabul and were taken to task by certain Ahadis posted on guard. The parties soon came to hot words and then to arms. In the scuffle, an Ahadi lost his life. His comrades sought redress at the Imperial court, that is, at the door of Mahabat Khan, who told them that if they could point out the particular offenders he would duly hold a thorough enquiry, and if the offences were proved, punish the guilty."<sup>48</sup> "The Ahadis withdrew, deeply dissatisfied with the answer which they regarded as evasion. They held a Conference, decided to wreck vengeance on the Rajputs and organized a general rising against them in the country. Next day they fell on a large body of Rajputs who happened to be encamped close to their own lodgings. Between 800 and 900 Rajputs, including some of Mahabat's best friends and the strongest pillars of his power, lay dead on the field. Simultaneously there broke out in the country a general rising which resulted in the death of many Rajputs and in the capture of nearly 500, who were carried beyond Hindukush and sold as slaves."<sup>49</sup>

Mahabat Khan's fortune took a turn and his own life was endangered. He ordered an enquiry and punishments to the guilty. When his forces had suppressed the risings, he brought many of the rioters to condign punishment. Kotwal Khan, Jamal Khan, Mohammad Khawas, Badiuzzaman and Khwaja Qasim, brother Khwaja Abul Hasan in particular, were charged with having encouraged the rising. All of them were summoned and cross-examined by Mahabat Khan and were sentenced to life imprisonment and confiscation of their property. Peace could be restored but Mahabat's principal force had suffered a considerable diminution and the people of Afghanistan and many of the royal troopers had been alienated from him.

Mahabat Khan's unpopularity and arrogance provided a golden opportunity to Nurjahan Begum to work up her

scheme and display class diplomacy. She devised a plan to remove suspicions from Mahabat Khan's mind about her credibility and started winning cautiously the nobles to her side after keeping close contacts with them. She asked Jahangir to impress upon Mahabat Khan that he was always desirous of his company and anxious to avail his counsel, but was helpless in the hands of Asaf Khan and Nurjahan. Jahangir, prompted by Nurjahan, conveyed to Mahabat Khan that he felt completely satisfied, being relieved of the unholy clutches of Nurjahan and was feeling free and relieved in the hands of his faithful general and the atmosphere had become more congenial for him to regulate the affairs of the Empire with greater efficiency under Mahabat Khan's benign advice and parlance.<sup>50</sup> Jahangir pretended to take Mahabat Khan into his full confidence and to relate to him all that Nurjahan told him in secret. He also warned Mahabat Khan against Nurjahan's designs to kill him and to poison him through Abu Talib's wife, the grand-daughter of the Khan-i-Khana. Jahangir also resumed his normal gaiety and celebrations. Guarded by the Rajputs, he went on hunting expeditions almost every day and ordered Qamarghas to be arranged. He paid visits to saint with Nurjahan and other members of his family and paid his reverential regards through token gifts.<sup>51</sup>

The plot was so well engineered and executed that in spite of all precautions and cleverness Mahabat Khan failed to imagine that the Emperor Jahangir could also be a party to such machinations. Mahabat Khan was so convinced of Jahangir's overtures and he became so complacent and care-free that he gradually decreased the number of his own Rajput body guards and considerably reduced the strength of the guard placed round the emperor's residence. Erroneously, he felt satisfied at Jahangir's change of attitude towards Nurjahan. Nurjahan at the same time was alert and active in seeing her plan through. She used all her resources at command and intellect to excite the already resentful nobles against Mahabat Khan. "She cajoled the unwilling; she bribed the greedy;

she strengthened the wavering; she held out promises to all. She enlisted the support of many humbler men as well and organized a great conspiracy."<sup>52</sup>

Mahabat Khan along with Imperial cortege left Kabul on Monday, the 1st Shahryar, 1626, for Lahore. On the way Jahangir continued to play his part with consummate tact, skill and thoroughness. As Motamid Khan puts it, 'He set Mahabat's heart at rest, and removed that doubt and suspicion with which Mahabat Khan had at first regarded him.'<sup>53</sup>

Nurjahan redoubled her activities. Gradually the number of her followers increased. She succeeded in posting many of them in the service of Jahangir, She got her eunuch, Hushiyar Khan to collect about 2,000 men in Lahore and proceed towards the Imperial Camp.<sup>54</sup>

A few miles away from Rohtas, Nurjahan staged the last scene of her drama. As Motamid Khan narrates, 'His Majesty determined to hold a review of the cavalry. He gave orders that all the soldiers, old and new; should form in two lines from the royal abode as far as they would extend. He then directed Buland Khan, one of his attendants to go to Mahabat Khan, and tell him that His Majesty was holding a review of the Begum's troops that day. It would be better therefore, for him to postpone the usual parade of the first day, lest words should pass between the two parties and strife ensue. After Buland Khan, he sent Khwaja Abul Hasan to enforce his wish more strongly and to urge Mahabat to go on a stage. The Khwaja, by cogent reasons, prevailed upon him.'<sup>55</sup> Nurjahan then released her husband from the clutches of the Khan and distinctly got better of him. Mahabat Khan was powerless to stay the march of events. His 'reign of hundred day's was over and he for the time being was isolated.'

Mahabat Khan ultimately failed, yet the black smoke of uncertainty threatened the political horizon. After the:

show of his surrender, he fled rapidly. The imperial army followed him closely but failed to overtake him. He was careful enough to take with him, among others as hostages, Asaf Khan, his son Abu Talib, the late Prince Daniyal's sons, Tahmuras and Hoshang and Lashkari, son of Mukhlis Khan. He was still hopeful of some miraculous turn in his fortune.

Nurjahan then organized a regular Durbar at Rohtas. To quote the eye witness Chronicler, "After regaining his liberty on the bank of the river where Jahangir had lost it a few months before, the most urgent question obviously was the reduction of Mahabat Khan and the release of the prominent Imperialists still with him. Seeking to connect the solution of this problem with that of another, Nurjahan sent an urgent mandate through Afzal Khan to Mahabat Khan, commanding him to release at once Asaf Khan, Abu Talib, Tahmuras, Hoshang, and Lashkari and to proceed to Thatta to combat Shahjahan. He was warned that if he made any delay in sending Asaf Khan, an army would be sent after him."<sup>158</sup>

Mahabat Khan released the sons of Prince Daniyal but he proposed to keep Asaf Khan and his sons as hostages with him until he was reasonably safe. He wrote to Jahangir in reply that he did not feel secure with Nurjahan and if he released Asaf Khan he apprehended pursuit by an army and that he would set him at liberty when he had passed Lahore. Nurjahan Begum replied back through Afzal Khan, that Asaf Khan must be released at once and threatened him in case of delay to press matters to the extremes.'

Mahabat Khan released Asaf Khan after exacting a promise of fidelity from him but still detained Abu Talib. After marching a few stages further towards Thatta, he sent Abu Talib also to the Court and complied with the royal commands. The sister thus played her pious role to free her brother from the clutches of a die hard enemy. The diplomacy enforced by shrewd Nurjahan with consummate skill and

perfect execution was matchless in form and procedure. She probably surpassed both Machiavelly and Bis mark when they embarked upon it in later centuries in Europe.

The Imperial Court arrived at Lahore. Nurjahan then decided to reorganize the administration. The recent events had exposed one and all who were boasting of fidelity and faithfulness. Thus she was cautious in making appointments to coveted posts. Asaf Khan was appointed the Vakil.<sup>57</sup> He was also made the Governor of Punjab with Abul Hasan as his Diwan.<sup>58</sup> Mir Jumla was appointed Bakshi, being succeeded in the office of Khansama or Steward by Afzal Khan, who had rendered valuable help in the hour of need. Muqarrab Khan was transferred from Cooch Bihar to the government of Bengal. Later on, the province was entrusted to Fidai Khan who was required to despatch ten lakhs of rupees to the royal court. Mirza Rustam Safari was appointed Governor of Bihar.

But these measures did not make any great transformation in the style of the administration which was loose at large on account of the strife of the last many years. The political tremors shook the entire fabric of Mughal administration. As a matter of fact Imperial Government under Jahangir was slowly moving towards twilight. The long shadows had already started appearing on the surface. It is true that Nurjahan by clever diplomacy could secure Jahangir's release but she found herself encircled by trials and disasters of high magnitude. She was in midst of tremendous difficulties and above all, to her greatest dismay and consternation, her husband, the emperor was showing no signs of improvement. Rather he was sinking day by day. And finally the 'Owner of the World' was out on 28 October 1627, leaving behind Nurjahan, only to lament in misery, sorrow and grief.

"My eyes have no other work but to shed tears.

What work can people do without hand and feet."<sup>59</sup>

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## *At Jahangir's Tomb*

Jahangir's admirers have painted him in bright colours and elaborated his achievements. Until his health failed him, Jahangir exerted himself manfully to shield his subjects from the oppression of his officers. Peace and prosperity reigned supreme in his empire. Under him, industry and commerce made striding progress; architecture attained notable triumphs, painting reached its high watermark; literature flourished in Persian and many Indian languages.<sup>1</sup> Terry observed, "All religions are tolerated and their priests are held in high esteem."<sup>2</sup> Pietro Della Valle recorded that Hindus and Muslims "live all mixed together and peacefully because the grand Mughal (Jahangir).....makes no difference in his dominion between the one sort and the other, and both in his court and armies and even among men of the highest degree, they are of equal account and consideration."<sup>3</sup>

Many scholars describe him as a strange compound of tenderness and cruelty, justice and caprice, refinement and brutality, good sense and childishness. But his merits ultimately win when his love of justice, religious toleration, creative energy and wisdom are taken into consideration. Whatever faults he possessed in his youth, his rule was an honest effort to maintain and extend the principles laid down

by his worthy father Akbar.<sup>4</sup> It would be no exaggeration to say that the entry of Nurjahan changed the life of Jahangir. Under her influence, Jahangir did not carry his anger as the flint carries fire. He no more revelled at the sight of men skinned to death. Like a Sufi, he read in the splendours of nature, a commandment for the unity of human kind and though not a very distinguished scholar, good words and better thoughts came to him readily when his eyes judged a panorama to be beautiful. Nurjahan changed him from a fierce, marble hearted autocrat to a compassionate, benign ruler interested more in the happiness of his subjects than his own.

The death of emperor Jahangir brought the question of succession to the forefront.<sup>5</sup> Nurjahan made a final bid to retain her power and hurriedly sent a messenger to her son-in-law, Shaharyar. But Asaf Khan was quite alert and proved too astute. He won Mir Bakshi Iradat Khan to his side and proclaimed Dawar Baksh, the son of Khusrav as King.<sup>6</sup> With the new king, he marched ahead and sent a Hindu noble, named Banarasi, to Shahjahan with a verbal message to quickly return from Deccan.<sup>7</sup>

Shahjahan stayed in the Deccan for a week to observe the period of mourning.<sup>8</sup> His counsellors advised him to hasten his journey to the north. It was like a triumphant procession. In the words of his biographer, "the period of his misfortunes was now over and the second dawn of his glory had set in."<sup>9</sup>

Asaf Khan manipulated to take out the three sons of Shahjahan from the care of Nurjahan and sent the body of the dead emperor to Lahore for burial. When Nurjahan requested him to allow her to move with her husband's body, Asaf Khan put her under surveillance and nobody was allowed to approach her or talk to her.

Shaharyar, learning about the death of his father and preparations of his enemies, seized the royal treasure and the entire artillery which Jahangir had left while going to

Kashmir. He arranged a large army to face Asaf Khan and his soldiers. The rival forces met within three 'kos' of Lahore.<sup>10</sup> Shaharyar was defeated and captured. Shortly after Tahmuras and Hoshang, the two sons of Daniyal, were imprisoned. Asaf Khan, playing a skilful game, removed from the scene, one by one, all the rivals of Shahjahan.<sup>11</sup>

When Shahjahan crossed Narbada and the royal cavalcade reached Sinur about the end of November, 1723, Shahjahan celebrated his lunar birthday. Amidst festivities, the news of Shaharyar's defeat at the hands of Asaf Khan reached Shahjahan. He ordered drums to be beaten and shahnai to be played in honour of the victory. He sent a firman to Asaf Khan asking him, in view of political and public considerations, to put out the eyes of Shaharyar, Dawar Baksh and punish all others.<sup>12</sup>

Shahjahan appointed Mahabat Khan as the Governor of Ajmer and set out for Agra. Khutba was read in his name of January 19, 1628 by Asaf Khan. Dawar Baksh was killed along with his brother Gaishan, Shaharyar and Tahmuras and Hoshang. Shahjahan was proclaimed the king at the time indicated by court astrologers on Monday, February 10, 1628. Fast couriers were despatched to distant provinces to proclaim his succession in every nook and corner of the Empire. The coronation festivities continued till the arrival of Asaf Khan who reached the precincts of Agra on 26 February 1628.<sup>13</sup> The emperor held a magnificent reception in honour of Asaf Khan and lavish presents were given to the women of the harem, specially to Arjumond Banu, his beautiful wife and niece of Nurjahan Begum. The foster mother Nurjahan, who was near her husband's corpse, was not remembered.

Tears rolled from her eyes when Maulana Hissaan-ud-Din recited the Kalma and prayed for the peace of the departed monarch. Nurjahan's agony knew no bounds. She moaned in pain and helplessness under the custody of her brother Asaf Khan, for whom she had done much and who owed his material progress and promotion to his liberal and large

hearted sister. The blue and red canvas of Nurjahan's camp was surrounded by a group of brave and fully armed Ahadis. Under the mini-coup, all her sympathisers and supporters were imprisoned and were allowed to march with the emperor's corpse only at the rear of the convoy and with vigilant guards.<sup>14</sup> Military men escorted the corpse of Jahangir to Lahore, for internment in the Dilkhusha garden—his favourite resort.<sup>15</sup>

The last rites of Jahangir were performed at Bimbhar under Asaf Khan's custody. He was buried at Shahdara in the Dilkhusha garden of Nurjahan Begum. Nurjahan decided to leave all desires and associations. She knew her husband and under stood him properly. A naturalist needed an open grave to be ever refreshed with rains and dews, and Nurjahan fulfilled her husband's intense love of nature when she did not erect a dome over it.

Asaf Khan ordered an enquiry into the intrigues and activities of his sister and found Nurjahan guilty of high treason in attempting to change the line of succession by putting Shaharyar on the throne.<sup>16</sup> Asaf Khan's strategy was to kill Nurjahan in the name of capital punishment. But providence wrought for her an escape from the evil design of her own brother. She did not express any desire to interfere in state affairs and wished to lead a peaceful life away from public gaze in the silent company of her husband's tomb.

She lived at Lahore in the same campus where Jahangir had been buried. She spent her time in prayes, meditation and philanthropy. Her privy purse of Rs. 2 lacs a year was meant to help the poor and the needy without publicity.<sup>17</sup> Quietly she lived, absorbed in thoughts of her husband, shunning in a moment all worldly ambitions, desires and accomplishments. No woman was ever so powerful as she; no woman as beautiful and no woman is remembered more than she in the entire three hundred years of Mughal history.

While at Lahore, she cleaned the tomb of Jahangir. She wore only white dresses and observed simplicity and austerity generally associated with widowhood. Her daughter Ladli Begum lived with her and gave her constant company in hour of misery and agony.<sup>18</sup> Herself a widow, she suffered the pangs of a rough life after passing a good deal of time in royal splendour. Full of sorrow over her mother's plight, she looked after her and taught the holy Quran to children. Her husband Shaharyar had been blinded and thrown into prison where he met an inglorious death.<sup>19</sup> Nurjahan, in her agony, wrote a poem conveying how hot red needles were thrust into Shaharyar's eyes. She felt it to be the blackest tragedy of her life and wrote :

"O God ! the maker and breaker of destinies, Give me the courage to put up with this cruel calamity with a degree of equanimity."<sup>20</sup>

She built an edifice on Jahangir's tomb and her loving husband ever remained alive in her memory and imagination. She regularly read Quran and imparted the young girls who came to her, the knowledge of Persian and Arabic. She trained them in sewing and embroidery, which she had practised in the days of adversity. She lacked the earlier fervour and time had changed as she had grown old. She was more a recluse than an inventor now. She had quit the stage which she had splendidly dominated for a long time. But as long as she lived she wanted to serve others and prove useful for them, to get reconciled to see all what she did being undone all through her life.

The memory of her erstwhile sway was forced to fade out. She was plunged into oblivion. The coins stamped with her name were at once withdrawn from public circulation.<sup>21</sup> Her glory as empress which had reached the pinnacle was dashed to the ground. She lived privately in sorrow and passed her life quietly. She was brave who never looked back or did try to seek any favours from the new emperor who to a considerable extent, was her 'make'.

Gradually her residence at Lahore became the asylum of the poor and the needy women. Her charity soon became famous in the empire. People still loved her. Those men and woman who were not concerned with power or pelf still came to have her 'Darshan'. Popular with the masses, she used to listen to them and give advice and alms both.<sup>22</sup> She cleaned the field-lamp and lit it up on the tomb every night 'as if she burnt herself at the alter of sublime love.' She had completely identified herself with her husband Jahangir. She had indeed burnt her emotions and aspirations, and as a true recluse, she wanted to live in seclusion and in service of the poor and the needy. The fact that once at the same Lahore she had spent days of imperial glory and splendour did not haunt or pester her. She was happy with her present lot. She never begged anybody of any aid and herself provided aid to all those who came to her in hunger or want.<sup>23</sup> The change in the behaviour of her kith and kin did not make her complain. Her intuition had grown in dimensions. She was so absorbed in her religious work and in the memory of her husband that nothing deterred her determination to lead the life of a hermitage. This shows her extra ordinary will power. Once a most powerful women on this earth she took no time to adjust, to live like a powerless ordinary woman, deriving the inner ecstasy from simplicity, which she could not derive from imperial glory. It is here that lies Nurjahan's greatness.

At Lahore she was not idle. She engaged many female orphans and widow women to work with her in sewing and embroidery. Most of her time was spent in reading the holy Quran at Jahangir's tomb. She observed Namaz five times a day and lived to help others. She did not murmur or beg any mercy from Shahjahan. She was devoid of power, deprived of her riches and destined to live with her husband in spirit. Throughout her life, she remembered Jahangir. In his company, she had enjoyed the lakes, springs, waterfalls and natural splendour of the valley of Kashmir. With him she had sat on the marble plinths of the gardens in the valley of paradise amidst blue and crystal clear water ways. The splendour of Nature provided luxurious feast to their discerning eyes.

and they joined together to sing in praise of the Lord who created all things bright and beautiful.

It was Nurjahan who had raised Khurram to the pinnacle and prestige of glory. Khurram also respected and adored Nurjahan for her virtues and wisdom. Misunderstandings led to Khurram's revolt which shocked Nurjahan more than it shocked Jahangir. It was Shahjahan who began the struggle.<sup>24</sup> He had been favoured by her many times. Nurjahan knew that he nourished an ambition to become the king. When he did become the king, he fixed an annual pension of Rs. 2 lacs per annum for Nurjahan Begum.<sup>25</sup> Neither did she try to interfere into the imperial affairs nor was she ever consulted by Shahjahan. She remained by the side of her husband's tomb till her death in 1645.

It would be wrong to say that she left power when she actually lost it or when she was helpless. The contemporary chroniclers testify that she would have found out the ways and means of indulging in court politics, intrigues and conspiracies even after the death of Jahangir and emergence of Shahjahan. Nurjahan, therefore, set an example by deserting power at will. She had enjoyed the grandeur of power when she was supreme in the empire. Under her able guidance, the Mughal forces established their superiority and invincibility. The warriors and nobles were mules before her diplomatic sway. Yet power attracted her only when Jahangir was alive and was with her in flesh and blood.

She had been so close to the administration and management of the state, that a willing withdrawal from the political scene was not a very easy task. Had she desired, she would have continued for some time more in the royal court, befriended Shahjahan and played her usual role in the political drama. But she readily left power ungrudgingly when it went out of her grasp.

The days at Lahore were sad and dreary. Wrinkles appeared on the beautiful face. Yet piety made her more serene

and beautiful. She prayed and remained absorbed in her daily routine of philanthropy and prayer. Hungry people who came to her for food were provided grains. She ate only after providing bread to them. They came for clothes and she offered them whatever she could manage from her meagre resources. They came to seek money for daughter's marriage or their illness and Nurjahan never said 'no' to anyone of them.

She still lived majestically, Altruism inspired her to live for others and find ample inner contentment. She never begged of Shahjahan for any thing 'material'. But she did not forget to send him her blessings and presents, specially on festivals. She maintained cordial relations with her members of royal family.

Nurjahan passed away in 1645 (Shawwal 29, 1055 A.H.) at Lahore.<sup>26</sup> Her funeral was a modest one. She was buried by the side of Jahangir's tomb. She had herself built her tomb and designed the place of her burial.<sup>27</sup> Shahjahan who permitted her to live in the self imposed seclusion, admitted that the empire lost in the demise of Nurjahan the peerless pearl of Persian origin. Thus ended the life journey of empress Nurjahan Begum whose word was once law and the entire Mughal Empire was dictated at her command.

But the kaleidoseope of time moved in the usual way changing the hue and colour. Nurjahan, for eighteen years, withered like a fading rose shedding the last perfume round the grave of her love and slept for ever by his side in a dark, low, brick and mortar monument which now lies under the Sun. At the height of her ascendancy, Nurjahan was all in all. In death, she became the ruins of the noblest family that ever migrated from Tehran to Agra.

The fact that Nurjahan saw her pitiable end is revealed by verses which she composed couple of years before her death, reflecting her grief and disillusionment.



Many of her pensive verses which she composed at Lahore, eloquently express her fears and griefs. In a communication to Shahjahan, she had expressed a desire that one particular couplet, 'without frills and feathers' be inscribed on the plaque at her grave.<sup>28</sup> She also requested the Emperor that her grave be located under the shadow of the tomb of her husband. In fact, she had marked a twenty-five square yards place where her body was to be consigned to earth.<sup>29</sup> Whereas in youth she conquered Jahangir with her beauty, in death she conquered herself with touching submission to the will of the Lord. Shahdara, where the royal couple rest, represents a place where beauty pays homage to the Lord and conveys the idea that 'thou art the supreme ruler'.

The tomb of Jahangir built by Nurjahan is a magnificent specimen of Mughal architecture, almost a perfection in balance, symmetry and poise in red sand stone inlaid with marble. As already stated Nurjahan built it at her own expenditure.<sup>30</sup> It has been calculated upto rupees twenty five lakhs. She supervised every detail of the marble chamber wherein lies the cenotaph. It would not be wrong to assert that she intimately knew the facets of her husband's mind. She left no architectural device unused to give him a place for eternal rest such as he would have liked to live in. The design of 'pietra dura' is undoubtedly superb in execution.

The tomb is in the middle of a large walled garden about 540 yards square, extending to sixty acres, originally with gateways on each side—that from the court of the Sarai on the west having a marble arch and being about fifty feet high. The mausoleum in the centre stands on a low plinth, 256 feet square, and itself consists of a terraced platform, 209 feet square and about twenty and half feet high, with octagonal minarets of three storeys above the terraced roof, surmounted by white marble cupolas, and rising eighty five feet from the plinth.<sup>31</sup>

The tomb is surrounded by arcades, having a central arch flanked by a doorway and five other arches on each side;

the arcades have behind them forty rooms in all, through one of which on each side a passage leads through other two oblong apartments into the tomb chamber, which is enclosed in nearly solid walls of masonry fifty-six feet thick on all sides. The sarcophagus is of white marble inlaid with pietra dura work and stands in an octagonal chamber of twenty six and a half feet diameter and about twenty one feet high. On the roof over this is a raised platform fifty-three feet square with a tessellated marble pavement. The long low facade between the Minars is not architecturally very effective'.<sup>32</sup> No dome was erected over the mausoleum. for the Emperor.

Jahangir adored nature. Its colours and designs fascinated him. Once he said in Kashmir that the language of nature was so powerful, and yet so simple, that it could be understood even by an infant in its swaddling clothes. For hours he would sit at the edge of the Dal lake and take mental notes of what the setting sun, the clear blue waters, the trees and flowers had to tell him. Roaming about, he was struck dumb with wonderment at the scenic splendour of the surroundings of Srinagar and Kashmir. Saffron fields in bloom, shimmering waterfalls, Chinar trees, gardens bursting at the seam with fruit and flowers, rivers and lakes all these were considered by Jahangir as expressions of the benevolence and fertility of nature.<sup>33</sup>

Amidst natural surroundings of Shahadara, Nurjahan, while alive, felt as if she still breathed in the company of her loving husband. Nurjahan's own resting place is a sepulchre like baradari<sup>34</sup> and is the humblest of all.<sup>35</sup> Gloriously she had lived as an empress but magnanimously she lived as a recluse by the side of her husband's tomb. The most powerful queen of Mughal history was buried just in a an ordinary manner, definitely marked the sway of fortune.

Many things have been said for or against her. Yet there is no doubt that Nurjahan Begum was special in all that she did in her life. She was great as beloved, greater as wife,

far great as queen Empress but greatest as a recluse lost in love of God. Nurjahan presents an image of indomitable will, deep attachment and austere detachment. She enjoyed to the full the power when she possessed it and remained detached and contented when dispossessed of it. These uncommon virtues make this uncommon woman, the most popular woman in the history of medieval womanhood. Elizabeth and Catherine fell too short of her in character and personality. Razia Begum fell low enough to come to her stature. Many other women known to history do not have a full saga of achievements to be assessed in comparison to her. She was unique in life, unique in love, unique in success, unique in failure and unique till her last breath.

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  26. *Ibid.*
  27. Badshah Nama, (Elliot and Dowson), *op. cit.*, Vol. VII, pp. 69-70.
  28. The English Translation of the verse inscribed on her tomb is given below :—

Man is Frail, God all powerful  
 In submission to His will lies the  
 High Road to Heaven  
 When I die, hark,  
 On my lowly grave there will neither be a  
 Flower nor an earthen lamp  
 Neither will there be heard the love song of  
 The cuckoo, nor the yearning of the moth  
 To sacrifice itself in fire.

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## *Conclusion*

Nurjahan, 'the light of the world' is the lone luminary in the Mughal heirarchy, who shed light, lyric and lustre wherever she lived and worked and whatever she did and out did. If her successes were enlightening, no less were her failures luminous. She really turned a new leaf in history, recording heroic feminism, to surpass the saga of erstwhile masculine chauvinism so characteristic of medieval age. She dared to do what man could not endure. She had a rare vision, ready tact, chivalrous bearing, winning manners and to crown them all—a disposition to envy. She was beauty personified that did not limit itself to body alone. Though her soft features were lightened up with a sprightly vivacity and superb loveliness, her beauty lay in her hold actions, decisions and perceptions.

If success enchanted Nurjahan, the failures did not dishearten her. If she was clever in diplomacy, she was aesthetic in taste. If she commanded at will, she was benevolent at alms. When she loved her husband, she gained his confidence. She played power with prowess and when outplayed, she shunned it without murmur. She was a graceful woman, full of gaiety, dignity and beauty. She excelled in all that she

did. She did not merely pass into history but resolutely made history.

"It is impossible", says Motamid Khan, 'to describe the beauty of the Queen.' He continues, "In any matter that was presented to her, if a difficulty arose, she simultaneously solved it. Whosoever threw himself upon her protection was preserved from tyranny and oppression."<sup>1</sup> Historians so far could not catch the finer elements in her personality and built up a story through the coloured lens provided to them by pscophant chroniclers or the foreigners who limited themselves to selfish gains alone.

Nurjaha was not a dream-woman or a puzzle-character. She was neither a goddess nor a witch. The historians failed to appreciate the real self behind this extraordinarily accomplished person who was a value-oriented institution in herself. She remained a woman first and last.

Motamid Khan blames her of elevating her relatives.<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Hadi confirms it.<sup>3</sup> The author of the 'History of Jahangir' notes that this family clique roused the jealousy and hostility of other nobles who resented the control of this group on the politics of the day.<sup>4</sup> Another modern historian holds her responsible for accelerating the resentment among some of the nobles and old grandees of the empire<sup>5</sup>. The foreign travellers paint her as a power monger who indulged in self-love and enjoyed absolute authority.<sup>6</sup>

According to Tujuk-i-Jahangiri, Nurjahan was a paragon of virtue, a noble woman, born to command, a lover of justice and wisdom incarnate. The real image of Nurjahan has been lost in the whirlpool of contradictory opinions expressed by all the scholars of medieval Indian History. To quote a few, Dr. Ishwari Prasad, instead of judging Nurjahan's role in history, reduced her to a mere secondary status either as Sher Afghan's counterpart of Jahangir's beloved. According to him, it is improbable that Jahangir as a prince loved and wanted to marry Nurjahan and that probably he had a hand in the

murder of Sher Afghan too. He writes, "Our suspicions are confirmed by the suddenness with which his (Sher Afghan's) arrest was attempted." He concludes that, "the circumstances of Sher Afghan's death are of a highly suspicious nature although there is no conclusive evidence to prove that the emperor was guilty of the crime."<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Beni Prasad rightly argues, "one can hardly think of any motive which would prompt Akbar to forbid a marriage between Meherunnisa and Salim."<sup>9</sup> Dr. A.L. Srivastava believes the story narrated by De Laet, "When she was still a maiden during the life time of Achbar, Jahangir had been in love with her; but she already been betrothed to the Turk Cheer Afghan and hence his father would not allow him to marry her, although he never entirely lost his love for her."<sup>10</sup> Dr. Srivastava goes to the extent of assuming that, "We know that ladies in the Mughal harem were clever match makers. Therefore while living with Salima Sultana Begum, Meherunnisa was already in the possession of the emperor. The emperor's marriage with her was postponed for four years in order to lull public suspicions."<sup>11</sup>

It is indeed shocking that falling in the line of alien historians, the Indian authors too have indulged in reducing Nurjahan's mighty personality to that of mere romantic dame and physical charm. She possessed all the strength and weaknesses present in a human being. Piety and moral integrity were her characteristics and she was neither morally weak nor devoid of the traditional values. Jahangir remarked about the Hindu women that they were flaming torches of love and dedication. This, in fact, holds true of empress Nurjahan Begum also. While assessing her character and personality one should not concentrate only upon her marriage with Jahangir and wrongly assess her. Her place in history is secure on account of the merit, worth and calibre displayed in the conduct of the affairs of the Empire.

Seldom have the noble deeds of women attracted attention in medieval Indian history, with the exception of Sultana



Razia. Nurjahan is the only one who glitters like gold in the mud of alloy all along. All historians, therefore have referred to her immense contribution to history and have dealt at length on the positive influence she exerted upon Jahangir—malign as well as benign. Her failings may be many but they sprouted out of her virtues; the compulsions were rooted in the gifts she was endowed with. Her mind was indeed as clear as an icicle yet it would be wrong to assert that she never faltered.

The essence of Nurjahan's personality was her deep faith in God. She was one who believed in the supremacy of the will of God over the most absolute form of human authority. She sang in her sweet composition :

"Man is Frail, God all Powerful,  
In submission to His will lies,  
The high road to Heaven."

The most commendable aspect of her character seems to be that she herself pursued the course set by providence for her and never murmured or complained against what was ordained. It should not be confused with inactivity or lethargy. She never faltered on the path of God. She displayed the true Indian spirit of tolerance and patience. She witnessed many a turn in her fortune with ease and equanimity. She believed in individual dignity and broad humanism.

Nurjahan was a faithful and obedient daughter. Her parents were proud of her character, achievements and intelligence. She immortalized her father through the homage paid in the architectural elegance of Etmad-ud-daula and mother through the Itr-i-Jahangiri. She always helped her brother and other relatives. All of them had qualities of head and heart and each one of them contributed greatly to the social, cultural and political life of the period.

Nurjahan was a loving wife and a benign mother. Her conjugal life with Sher Afghan was happy and contented. She loved her daughter immensely. When she married Jahangir, her dedication to him was supreme. She was always concerned about his health and welfare. A creative genius as she was, she made the reign of Jahangir memorable in history by providing incentives and encouragements to talents in arts, handicrafts and cottage industry.

What impresses most is her love for Jahangir. It was bloless, flawless, matchless and selfless. She married Jahangir when she was quite mature and Jahangir quite aged. Curiously enough, she knew all the details of the reckless life that Jahangir led both as a youth and as an emperor and yet she loved him. After four years of hard and hectic life in the harem, the matrimonial proposal came from Jahangir himself and she just accepted it, nourishing no ambition for her elevation or glorification. She was aware of the political manouverings and intrigues in the royal court and knew well that the emperor was in need of sober, sincere and sane advice of a consort upon whom he could depend. By Nurjahan's cooperation, tact, vision and goodwill, the Mughal empire could rest firm, endure long and flourish well. After her marriage, she inspired Jahangir to usher in an ideal rule and streamline the administration keeping the well-being of his people always in the forefront.

Nurjahan had a sharp intellect and quick understanding. She patronized painting, music, art and literature. She possessed an inventive brain. Devising new dresses, ornaments and styles in interior decoration, she set up high standards in the world of fashion and design.

Nurjahan was generous and benevolent. She gave alms and charity till her death and even when she had meagre resources in her widowhood. She was full of courage and bravery. An excellent rider and a shot, her multiple genius expressed itself with exuberance.

She loved Jahangir intensely with single minded devotion and dedication. She served her ailing husband with great care and affection. It was on account of her that Jahangir reduced the number of his daily cups of wine and restrained himself from excessive drinking to which his two younger brothers had succumbed.

With the advent of Nurjahan, a psychic change descended upon Jahangir. His attitude towards life, became optimistic and he tried to avoid tensions. Nurjahan's practical wisdom and insight into human problems enamoured Jahangir. He started taking a rational view in devising policies and implementing plans. He started adhering strictly to the principles of Suleh-i-Kul enunciated by his worthy father. Based upon equity and justice to all, he bestowed upon his people rights and privileges without any distinction of cast, creed or religion.

Nurjahan enhanced the splendour and grandeur of the Mughal Court and infused a new vigour and life in Jahangir. Jahangir never became dull or depressed in her company. He was himself not unwilling to pass the reins of government into the hands of a strong personality like Nurjahan whom he loved with all his ardour of passion. Nurjahan understood Jahangir perfectly well. She studied his temperament and approved all the principles of his government. She spread him of great deal of exertion and anxiety. The illness of Jahangir forced her to take the reins of the government in her own hands. In a humorous mood, Jahangir said that he only wanted a bottle of wine and a piece of meat to make merry and Nurjahan was well fitted to rule.<sup>22</sup> But she was not ambitious enough to act independently. The illness of her husband forced her entry into politics and she fared better than Elizabeth I or Catherine the Great.

Nurjahan insisted upon Jahangir to set apart large sums of money for projects of public utility. The construction of trunk roads connecting one end of the Empire to the other was

geared up and facilities of communication were fast improved. Inns, Hospitals and Schools were opened. Gardens and parks were so designed and laid out as to avail the bounties of Nature.

The reforms enunciated by Akbar were continued by Jahangir at the instance of Nurjahan. She was liberal and large hearted and was ever conscious of her responsibilities as 'Padshah Begum'. She was keenly alive to her duties as Empress. She took steps to remove the injustices and discriminations in the name of religion, caste or tradition. The orthodox nobles and the Ulemas were totally against renewing Akbar's code of liberal humanism. But Nurjahan ignored them and advised Jahangir to pursue the broad based policies of his great father who had built up the edifice of Mughal empire on a solid foundation of peace with all.

Nurjahan instilled in the mind of the emperor that the first duty of a ruler was to bestow justice, equality and generosity upon his people. She sat by the side of Jahangir in the royal court, listened to the petitions and solved intricate problems of her subjects. Throughout the empire, Jahangir came to be known as the symbol of pristine justice, law, generosity, humanism and kindness. His occasional bursts of cruelty were contained and controlled to large extent by Nurjahan. She helped the poor and needy by distributing alms and gifts and gave special money for the marriage of poor girls. The bereaved families received maintenance allowance from the Darbar.

Nurjahan enunciated reforms in such a manner as to wipe out old traditions which exploited the poor and the unprivileged. She stopped the customary practice of presentation of the male children before the Emperor by the Rayyats. It was upon her advice that Jahangir issued a decree banning this practice all over the empire and prescribing severe punishments to those guilty of child traffic. When some nobles tried to copy the king's life style and began acting as

mini-kings, she inspired Jahangir to issue a strongly-worded Firman to stop such a tradition as early as possible. She issued orders to punish the criminals who committed atrocities upon peasants and women and thus protected the tillers of the soil from exploitation. Those found guilty were given capital punishment by the royal court.

A Shia herself, Nurjahan supported and encouraged toleration. The concept of justice was a fixity for her. Her charity went to people of all castes and creeds alike. She took part in Hindu festivals of the Court.

History and religion were favourite studies of Nurjahan Begum. She stored carefully the 'Rakhi' of Rani Karmawati to Humayun as a souvenir in the royal vault at Agra.

It was Nurjahan who made Jahangir realize the efficacy of liberal ideas of peace and toleration. Jahangir began to cultivate respect for other religions specially Hinduism. He realised that all paths led but to one goal. His mystic verses clearly reflect his philosophical bent of mind. The exceptions were mostly due to religion and politics being inseparable in life. His interest in deserving Sadhus and Fakirs was remarkable. It was, infact, none else but Nurjahan who transmitted noble and sublime thoughts into Jahangir's mind. Nurjahan inspired her husband to visit Mathura to reconcile the Hindus and redress their grievances. She made an earnest attempt to know the fundamental principles of Hinduism and impressed upon him to put a stop on the practice of conversion. She discussed with her husband the mystic revelations of Vaishnavism which impressed her during the stay of the royal party at Mathura. Her progressive and liberal ideas had a singular impact upon Jahangir who became more and more liberal and humane in the transaction of justice and implementation of the policies of the Government. And naturally her excellence in demeanour and disposition made Nurjahan the pivot round which the government moved in the just direction.

When the intrigues and conspiracies of the jealous nobles, and ambitious princes kept Jahangir in constant agitation, it was Nurjahan's conciliatory role that did the real good and her sublime touch was soothing to the emperor. Thus peace and unity could exist in the midst of turmoil. It was the magic spell of the beloved queen upon an Emperor in need of solace and relaxation and restoration.

The qualities of Nurjahan's character were detachment, tolerance, forbearance, reconciliation and adjustment to hard realities of life. She withdrew from the world and took to complete renunciation and retirement after her husband's death. After having been so closely associated with the affairs of the empire and having enjoyed full majestic power, her voluntary withdrawal from politics is again an example of her extraordinary will power and complete sense of detachment. Her abandonment of politics reveals that all her interests in politics and power games were confined to her love, adoration and duty towards Jahangir. Had she elected otherwise, she could use her ability, intimate knowledge of politics and her contacts with a section of nobility to cook up certain plans, win the confidence of Shahajahan and continue to enjoy power. But her taste for politics ended with her sweetheart and she became a recluse to pass her remaining years at her husband's tomb.

Nurjahan did have weaknesses as any human being has. She was greedy and wanted to amass money. She encouraged the alien trading companies to exploit them and earn as much as possibly she could. In the long run it was detrimental. She kept good relations with the Portuguese as well as the English. Her shipmen paid custom duties to the Portuguese notwithstanding the implications. She maintained best relations with the English merchants. She often issued orders granting them tax concessions. The English profited by her favours. She managed Firmans for them which contained royal sanctions and concessions for trade and commerce. In these transactions, her brother Asaf Khan was the chief

agent and intermediary. She exchanged gifts and presents with the English traders and factors and their royal head.

William Hawkins writes, "knowing the custom of these moores that without gifts and bribes nothing could go forward, I sent my broker to seek out for jewels fitting for royalty and presented jewels to the sister of Jahangir and his paramour.<sup>13</sup> Coryat, another traveller, gave to her husband "a gold whistle weighing almost anounce, studded with sparks of rubies" which Jahangir presented to Nurjahan.<sup>14</sup>

Sir Thomas Roe gave many rich presents to Nurjahan Begum. He gave her an English coach, a mirror chest and many toys.<sup>15</sup> There was a craze for European curiosities in the Mughal Court. Nurjahan received 'nazar' and presents from the courtiers as well. The Europeans condemned the practice of bribery but still they had to follow the custom of the court. Presents and offerings were thus, amassed by Nurjahan Begum.<sup>16</sup>

Another mistake of Nurjahan was that she could not tolerate a dissenting person. The way she dealt with Khurram shows her inherent weakness. Had she preferred Khurram over Shaharyar, history would have been different. Lot of bloodshed, strife and turmoils could have been avoided. Her stubbornness was no virtue. It led to political blunders which even led to the imprisonment of the Emperor at the hands of a slave commandant. All these developments leave dark imprints on both her personality and also upon the politics of her time.

Shahjahan was an outstanding soldier who had attained spectacular victories in Deccan and Mewar. In the beginning Nurjahan patronized him. When Shahajahan began taking decisions against her will and searched his own individual identity, her unlimited authority got endangered. She began with a sternly worded Firman against him when he rebelled. In the end, she adopted the policy of conciliation when Parvez

and Mahabat Khan attempted to give a setback. She then totally alienated Mahabat Khan by adopting a harsh policy towards him. The older group of nobility saw in the treatment meted out to Mahabat Khan, a kind of warning for the future. Though she won in diplomacy and adventure, the cream of the Mughal army perished in the encounter. Nurjahan outmanouvered Mahabat Khan in military strategy and ended his inglorious rule of hundred days since his coup. The greatest contribution of Nurjahan to the Mughal royal family were her dauntless and courageous steps to release Jahangir and restore back the prestige of the Great Mughals which was endangered also on account of her own miscalculations.

She brought about a metamorphosis in the life of her husband but her search for truth and beauty continued even after her separation from Jahangir. It is to her credit that she did not resist Shahjahan's rise to the throne. She was lost in the holy books to escape public attention. When she left the world Amir-ul-Hasan, the poet, sang

“The trees stood still, the birds stopped singing,

And the blue dome of the heaven, stopped revolving in  
sorrow and disbelief.”

Shanjahan was one of the pall-bearers who had carried Nurjahan's dead body to its last resulting place in the vicinity of Jahangir's tomb. In her passing, the world lost a beautiful woman, a benign ruler, a sagacious diplomat, a talented artist, a poetess of imagination, a singular lover of nature and a unique individual whose feet were firmly set on the ground and whose head touched the sky. Like all the Mughals, Nurjahan wielded authority in the name of God. What is more remarkable about her is that she relinquished authority in His name.



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# **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### INCIDENT OF SHER AFGHAN'S DEATH

Hyder Malik, the author of *Tarikh-i-Kashmir* was an eye witness of the killing of Sher Afghan. He gives exact details of the incident which are not given by any other contemporary or later authority. According to Hyder Malik, Yusuf Khan killed Sher Afghan after Amba Khan had received the fatal wound at the hands of Sher Afghan. According to other contemporary sources and later sources he was killed by the soldiers of Qutbuddin who do not mention the name of the assailant. Since Hyder Malik was an eye witness; his statement can be safely accepted.

The later sources like *Muntakhabul Lubab*, *Khulast-ut-Tawarikh*, *Riyad-us-Salatin*, *Miftah-ut-Tawarikh* etc. allege that Jahangir was involved in Sher Afghan's assassination as he had an insatiable desire to possess Mehrunnisa, for whom he cherished an adolescent love. These statements of later authorities are not supported by contemporary historical testimony.

“Next Yusuf Khan went to Bardwan and finding access into the fort began to harass Sher Afghan's men. He plundered the houses of many old faithful servants, the house of Sher Afghan's mother and the member of his mahal which also included Mehrunnisa, the daughter of Ghayas Beg. Ali Malik

brought their news to me. In spite of that deep wound, getting all my kinsmen with me, accompanied by Ali Beg. I reached to the rescue of the Begum. With full respects, I brought her to my own house and did my best to provide comforts for her. For forty days with thirty out of my kinsmen I guarded her. When the letter of Kishwar Khan, the son of Qutub Khan, and Wazir Khan arrived calling her to Rajmahal, I, still with all my kinsmen, was engaged in hospitality. After reaching Rajmahal she favoured me by sending me a letter of recommendation to Itimad-ud-daula."

## APPENDIX B

### MIRZA GHAYAS BEG 'ITIMAD-UD-DAULA'

<i>Year</i>	<i>Mansabs</i>	<i>Titles awards and Appoint-ments</i>
1577	300	Diwan of Kabut
1596	700	Diwan-i-Buyatat
1605	1,500	Title of Itimad-ud-daula, Appoint- ed Wazir of half of the dominion
1608	1,000/250	...
1611	1,800	...
	2,000/500	Rs. 5,000/- as 'Inam'
	—	Wizarat-i-Kul (In place of Khwaja Abdul Hasan)
1612	4,000/1,000	...  Inkpot and studded Pen
1614	5,000/2,000	...
1615	6,000/3,000	Alam, Naqqara
1616	7,000/5,000	Privilege of beating his drums after those of Khurram

- |      |                   |   |
|------|-------------------|---|
| 1617 | ...               | Direction to the ladies of the harem<br>not to veil their faces before Iti-<br>mad-ud-daula                 |
| 1617 | ...               | Emperor placed his own turban<br>from his own hands on the head<br>of Itimad-ud-daula Elephant<br>conferred |
| 1618 | 7000/7,000        | ...   |
|      | 17 Bahman<br>1031 | Death of Itimad-ud-daula  |

## APPENDIX C

### ASAF KHAN IV

<i>Year</i>	<i>Mansabs</i>	<i>Titles, awards and Appoint-ments</i>
1611	—	Title of Itiqad Khan
	—	Appointed Khan-i-Saman
	—	Special sword 'Sar Andaz' given of gift
1612	1,000/300	—
	2,000/500	—
1614	3,000/1,000	Title of Asaf Khan
1615	4,000/2,000	—
1616	5,000/4,000	Alam, Naqqara
1617	5,000/5,000	—
1618	5,000/5,000 (4,000 × 2-3h)	—
1619	—	Jewelled Khapw and Phul-Katara
1620	—	Appointed Diwan of Gujarat
1622	6,000/6,000	—

	—	Subedari of Bengal & Orissa, Special dress of Honour & jewelled sword
1622	7,000/7000	Subedari of Punjab and appointed wakil
	7,000/7000 (2-3h)	—
1628	8,000/8,000 (2-3h)	Appointed wakil, Subedari of Punjab and Multan
	—	Bandar-i-Lahri as reward
	—	Kilat-i-Khas, Charqub Khan-jar Murassa, Phulkatara, Shamshir Murassa, Purdila Murassa Alam, Naqqara Tuman and Taugh, Entrusted with 'Ozuk seal', addressed as 'Ammu'
1629	—	Khilat-i-Khas, Charqub Jaradozi, Khanjar, Murassa, Phul Katara, Shamshir Murassa two khasa horse with fine Murassa and Jine Tila, Elephant with silver saddle
1632	—	Khilat Khas, Charqub Zardozi
1634	—	Title of Khan Khanan Sipah Salar
	—	Khilat-i-Khas, Charqub Zardozi, Shamshir Murassa
	9,000/9,000 (2-3h)	—
1639	—	Khilat, Khanjar, Murassa, Phulkatara, Khasa horse with golden saddle
1641	—	Death of Asaf Khan



## APPENDIX D

### A RARE EDICT OF NURJAHAN

The Edict begins with a Sarnama. Just below the Sarnama towards the left is Tughra of Nur Jahan designed in golden ink. Parallel to the Tughra towards the right is beautiful seal of Empress comprising four elliptical panels.

The first and last panels are smaller than the remaining two. The text which is executed in exquisite Nastaliq style of Persian calligraphy consists of 6 lines of which the first two are shortened as was customary with the imperial Mughal Edicts. It is interesting to note that the first two lines of Earmen-i-Sultani or Royal edicts were shortened in order to distinguish them from the chancellery orders called Ahkam-i-Diwani. The present edicts does not bear any Zimn or endorsements on the reverse.

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<i>Sarnama</i>	<i>Transliteration</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Tughra	Allah-u-Akbar Hukm-i- aliyyh-i-ajijah mabad-i- uliya Nur Jahan Badshah Begam	God is Greatest The decree of the most sublime cradle of the Lofty Nur Jahan Begum the Em- press (ii)

Seal (first panel)	Allah-u-Akbar	God is greatest
(Second panel)	Zenur-i-mihri Jahangir Badshah-i-Jahanban 1033	God is Greatest From the Love of Emperor Jahangir the Pro- tector of the world 1033 (1624 A.D.)
(Third panel)	Nigini      Nur      Jahan Badshah gasht      furozan Sinni Julus 19	the bezel of Em- press Nur Jahan derived resplen- dence (III) 19 regnal year

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*Test :* Be its known to Sher Khan resilient with courage and valour worthy of kindness and favour, entitled to attention and bounty distinguished and made hopeful by Her exalted Grace, that at this time it has been brought to the exalted notice by the petition of the refugee of Learning and reputed Servant Hakim Ruh Allah, that one entitled to bounty (i.e. Sher Khan) has not delivered two out of the total number of villages granted to him (Ruh Allah) by the royal farman as madad-i-maash (iv) is entirely and has also imprisoned his writers on the plea that in the royal farman the amount is specified. This has not been rightly done (It is ordered) now that the day that the illustrious Nishan is received both the aforesaid villages in entirety be delivered to the aforesaid Hakim.

The Edict has been addressed to Sher Khan whose name according to Jahangir was Nahir Khan. His father Khan Jahan was in the Service of Asir and Burhanpur. When Khan Jahan died Nahir Khan was very young and was adopted by Hayat Khan as his son. After the death of Hayat Khan,

Raja Ali Khan brought him up and took good care of him. When Akbar conquered Asir, Nahir Khan joined his service. The Emperor raised him to a suitable mansab and gave him a Jagir, the Pargana of Muhammadpur in Malwa. Under Jahangir, he advanced more and more. On receiving the royal summons he came from the Deccan on thursday 6 urdi bihisht 1027 A.H. (1628 A.D.) and waited on the-Emperor on the bank of Kankriya at-Ahmedabad. A few days after on-Thursday 10 Shaban 1027 A.H. (1618 A.D.) he was promoted to the mansab of 1,500 Zat and 1,000 horse and was presented with an elephant at Ahmedabad. He remained loyal to the royal cause during the revolt of Prince Khurram and consequently raised to the mansab of 3,000 with 2,000 horse and was given a horse and an elephant along with the title of Sher Khan on 22nd Rajab 1032 A.H. (1623 A.D.).

## APPENDIX E

### NUR JAHAN KI SARAI

(Archeological Survey of India-Report of A Tour in the Punjab in 1877-78, U.P. XIV-Alexander Cunnighan).

The small town Nurmahall in Jalandhar Doab was named after the famous Empress of Jahangir and in honour of her its Badshahi Sarai was built of unusual size and with two highly ornamented stone gateways. Nurmahal is situated 25 miles to the east south east of Sultanpur 16 miles to the south of Jaladhar and 13 miles to the West of Phalor. The site is an old one as proved by the large brick 13 by 11 by  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches, which are dug up in great number, as well as by numerous coins found on the spot, which range from the earlier times down to the present day.

The Sarai is 551 feet square, outside including the octagonal towers at the corners. The western gateways is a double storeyed building faced on the outside with red sand stone from Fatehpur Sikri quarries. The whole front is divided into panels ornamented with sculpture but the relief is low and workmanship coarse. There are angels and fairies, elephants and rhinoceroses, camels and horses. Monkeys and peacocks with men on horseback and archers on elephants. The sides of the gateway are in much better taste, the ornament being limited to foliated scroll work with birds sitting

on branches but the design is much better than the execution as there is little relief. Over the entrance there is long inscription.

There was also a similar gate way on the eastern side, but this is now only aheap of ruin and all the stone facing has disappeared. There was also an inscription over this gateway.....It was fortunately preserved by one of the inhabitants.

In the north side of the courtyard there is masjid and in the middle fine well. On each side there are 32 rooms each 10 ft. 10 inches square with a verandah in front. In each corner there were three rooms, one large two small. The Emperor's apartments formed the centre block of the south side, three storeys in height.

The rooms were highly finished but all their beauty is now concealed under the prevailing whitewash. The main room was oblong in shape with a half octagon recess on two sides, similar to the large rooms in the corners of the Sarai. There was accommodation inside for about 100 people. But the great mass of imperial followers found their quarters outside, in an exterior court about 2,000 ft. square, some of the walls of which were there till 1838 (pointed out to me in Nov. 1838,) All these have disappeared now.

The Sarai is said to have been built by Zakariya Khan the Nazim of Suba of Jalandhar, during the reign of Jahangir. His inscription, which is cut in sunken letters on the right Jamb of the western gateway says nothing about the building of the Sarai while the man inscription over the western gateway distinctly states that the Sarai was erected by the orders of Nur Jahan (Ba hukum Nur Jahan Begum).

The date is given in the last line according to the abjad or numerical powers of the letters.

“Abad shud Za Nur Jahan Begum ain Sarai.” The whole inscription in five rhyming verse is as follows :

**Over the Delhi Gate**

1. Shah Jahan Bahadur Jahangir Badshah Shahanshahe  
Zamin o Zaman Saye Khuda.
2. Mamur Kard baske Jahan ra ba adlo-dad to asman  
raised bina ba sare bine.
3. Nur-e-Jahan Ke hamdam-o-hamsaz Khas aust  
Jamrud ain Sarai was-ie-Sipahar Sa.
4. Chun ain binai kher ba rue Zamin Nihad bada bin  
ai um rash Jawed bar baka.
5. Tarikh ain-chun Gasht murattib ba guff akd abad  
Shud Za Nur Jahan Begum ain Sarai.

**Translation**

1. During the reign of Jahangir Badshah Lord of the  
universe king of kings of world & his time, the  
shadow of God.
2. The fame of whose goodness and justice overspread  
the earth until it reached even the highest heavens  
above.
3. His wife a trusted companion Nur Jahan command-  
ed the erection of this sarai wide as heavens.
4. When this fortune building rose upon the face of  
the earth.  
May its walls last for ever & ever.
5. The date of its foundation was found in the words  
"This Sarai was founded by Nur Jahan Begum."

The inscription over the west gateway, which is in four  
rhyming verses is as follows over the west of Lahore Gate.

1. Badaur adle Jahangir Shah Akbar Shuh Ki Asman-  
O-Zamin misl au nadard yad.

2. Binai Nur Sara shud ba khitah Phalor ba hukam Nur Jahan Begum farishtah Nihad.
3. barai sal binayash sukhware khush Guff ke shud Za Nur Jahan Begum ain Sarabad 1028.
4. Chu shud Taman khirad guff bahad tarkihah ba shud za Nur Jahan Begum ain Sarabad 1030.

The last half two of the inscription gives the date of A.H. 1030 by merely adding the letter B to the seventh half time, thus changing shud to ba shud and adding 2 to the number. The words are arranged some what differently, the abad being placed at the end of the line.

1. During the just rule of Jahangir Shah son of Akbar Shah whose like neither heaven or earth remembers.
2. The Nur Sarai was founded in the district of Pholor by command of the angel like Nur Jahan Begum.
3. The date of its foundation the poet happily discovered this sarai was founded by Nur Jahan Begum, 1028.
4. The date of its completion wisdom found in the words "This Sarai was erected by Nur Jahan Begum," 1030.

## APPENDIX F

The following Nishans of Nurjahan are preserved in Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Class of Corres- pondence</i>	<i>Name of the Writer</i>	<i>Name of addresses</i>	<i>Subject</i>
August 1622	Nishan	Empress Nurjahan	Raja Jai Singh	Desiring him to send the money of the lease of Amer per Mohd. Hashim.
Novem- ber 1624	„	„	„	Expressing pleasure on his (Raja's) dis-association with Mahabat Khan, desires him now to act according to the wishes of Khan-i-Jahan.
Novem- ber 1625	„	„	„	Desiring him to act according to the orders conveyed to him through Fidai Khan.



Decem- ber 1625	„	„	„	Sending a Khilat per Khwaja Koz Bihan.
October 1626	„	„	„	Desiring the Raja to report every thing to the Royal Court and not to act against the Royal Orders.

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